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The Chevalier Corsair; OR, THE HERITAGE OF HATRED.

A Romance of Northern and Southern
Lands and Seas.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER."

CHAPTER I.

THE CORSAIR'S BOOTY.

"HARK!"

The voice that uttered the one word was deep and stern, and the low hum of half a hundred voices ceased, and a deathlike silence followed, until afar off, clear and ringing, were heard the notes of a bugle, winding forth a strain that rose and fell melodiously upon the night air, and floated away on the evening breeze, until it reached the waiting ears of a man, standing erect, and with arms folded upon his broad

breast, glancing out over the dark waters, while around him crouched a band of men, the reckless, savage crew of the beautiful vessel whose deck they trod, and above which hung motionless the folds of an outlaw flag.

"It is the signal; Hernandez is true, if not to me, at least to his own sordid interests; come!"

Springing upon the bulwarks of his vessel, which was moored close in against a rock, the speaker began the rugged ascent of the overhanging cliff, followed, in single file, by his men, all of them armed to the teeth.

Once upon the summit the leader paused and glanced down upon his trim schooner, hardly visible as it lay sixty feet beneath his feet, but whose pencil-like, rakish masts rose above him.

"A bad place to get out of, should we be pursued by the soldiers from the forts, for these alone would be deadly weapons in their hands," and he kicked over a stone, which, with many others, lay at his feet, and then let his eyes rest upon the small, land-locked bay beyond, while he muttered, as though thinking aloud, rather than addressing his men:

"But once away from this cliff, with the

wind where it is, we can run out easily before the Spanish cruisers could weigh anchor and sail around to head us off."

"It is a risky place to venture into, chief," observed a young man, whose dress and appearance even in the darkness indicated his rank as an officer.

"But the reward will be worth the risk, and though I do not believe in this land-robbing work, my conscience is at rest in this case, Conrado, as I seek revenge against Don Ivan for mercilessly having nine of my crew put to a cruel death. But come, we must on, for there rise again the notes of the bugle," and turning to his men, who stood in silence around him, the chief continued, aloud:

"Lads, remember there is to be no bloodshed, unless I give the command. The treasure we get here goes to you, for I want none of it, as I told you, and only come on this expedition to keep my pledged word to one who once served me well. Follow me, and be as silent as ghosts."

So saying, he led the way around the edge of an orange grove, for the scene was a small



"ALAS! LADY, I CAN BUT TELL THE TRUTH; MEN CALL ME BELMONT, THE BUCCANEER."

island of the West Indies under the rule of old Spain, and, followed by his men, who did indeed look like grim specters in the gloom, he soon came out upon a rolling lawn, beyond which glimmered the white walls of a grand old *hacienda*, from the windows of which gleamed one solitary light.

"Halt!"

The order came not from the chief, but from a man dimly visible in the shadow of an orange tree; but the word was yet on his lips when, with the spring of a tiger, the outlaw was upon him, his iron clutch upon his throat, and his strength hurling him to the ground with a force that slightly stunned him.

"Mercy, señor chief, mercy, for it is Hernandez!" gasped the frightened man.

With a light laugh the chief raised him to his feet, saying, calmly:

"Be more circumspect, Señor Hernandez, in halting a line of armed men, bound upon a dangerous expedition. I believed that we had been betrayed, and the soldiers were upon us."

"Oh, no, the night patrol has gone its rounds, señor, and my gold got the bugler to do his work as I agreed with him; did you not hear his signal?"

"Yes; I was no fool to venture here without; is all safe?"

"As safe as a graveyard at night," answered the man, speaking in Spanish, as the chief had done.

"Then we will go on at once. I have given orders to my men that there is to be no bloodshed; they are to have the gold you point out to them, and the jewels, which you can easily bear off, are to be yours."

"Yes, señor; that is our compact."

"Then it shall be carried out, though I hate to aid in such work, and would not, were it not that I have a score to settle with Don Ivan."

"He is not at home, señor."

"Such you told me in Havana was to be the case; how many servants are there in the mansion?"

"About a score, but they sleep in a distant wing of the hacienda."

"And the fort is a mile away?"

"A short mile, señor, so we must work in silence."

"So be it; now lead the way to your thieving work, Don Hernandez."

"You are severe, señor."

"I am truthful; it is a despicable deed you are guilty of, Manuel Hernandez, but when you saved my life, six months ago, in Havana, I pledged myself to serve you when asked, and I keep my word, though it is to rob your own kindred; but I sweeten my conscience with the thought that your kinsman put to death nine of my crew; that I give my men the gold, touching not one *peso* myself, and am getting rid of my obligation to you; now let us have the thing over."

"Señor chief, your words are insulting," and Don Hernandez's tone was in evident anger.

"I never choose my words in addressing a villain, señor; but lead on, for I want no quarrel with you," was the haughty reply.

A muttered imprecation came to the lips of the young Spaniard, for such he was, but there was something in the tone and manner of the leader that checked further words, and he silently led the way across the lawn.

In silence they reached the mansion and crouched close in the shadows of the walls, in front of an arched doorway leading into the basement.

"Rest here; I will open it from within," said Don Hernandez, in a low tone, and he disappeared around a wing of the mansion, and like statues in ebony, as they looked in the darkness, stood the buccaneers, awaiting his return.

Having gone to the rear of the dwelling, which was a large, rambling and most elegant old structure, occupying a full acre of land, Don Manuel Hernandez approached a portico, ascended the steps, and tapped lightly at a door, half hidden in vines.

It was opened by a young and pretty quadroon, who, recognizing him, bade him enter.

"Well, pretty Ninetta, has my sweet cousin retired?"

"No, Señor Manuel; though the hour is late she is in her own *salon*," answered the handsome negress.

The visitor crossed the corridor, preceded by Ninetta, and was ushered into a large but luxuriously-furnished sitting-room, off which was a small sleeping-chamber and toilet room.

Every article of furniture, and the whole surroundings, were indicative of wealth and refined taste, and the fair mistress of the mansion reclined upon a divan, her fingers running lightly over the strings of a Spanish *bandola*.

In face and form she was exquisitely beautiful, possessing a beauty that would shine resplendent in any assemblage of lovely women; her figure was slight, yet every curve of limb was perfect, and each feature of her face was faultless, while her eyes were as black as night, as were also the long-fringed lashes and arched brows, and her hair, hanging in massive braids around her, was the purest auburn in hue.

Dressed in a white wrapper, half reclining,

half sitting, with her tiny feet incased in jeweled slippers, and her small hands holding the *bandola*, she looked like some fairy of an Oriental clime.

"Ah, it is you, cousin Manuel!" was her rather cold salutation, as the young man entered, and who now, as the lights of the room fell upon him, proved to be dressed in the uniform of a Spanish captain, and possessed a dark, handsome, yet not a good face, for it was marked by reckless dissipation.

"Yes, cousin mine, there are some books in my uncle's library I wish to look over for reference, and, with your permission, I will spend the night there, throwing myself upon the lounge when fatigued."

"Your room is at your service, Don Manuel, as you know, and we breakfast at nine, if you care to remain," she said, in the same cold tone she had before used.

"No, I must back to my quarters at the fort, and in fact my search of the volumes I refer to may not detain me long. Good-night, sweet cousin," and approaching nearer, he continued in a whisper:

"I never saw you looking so beautiful before, and your charms but add to my intense love for you."

"Need I tell you again that your love for me is a vain hope, Don Manuel?"

"No, for it is not pleasant to hear. Good-night once more," and, taking a lamp handed to him by Ninetta, he left the room, crossed a wide hall, and turned into a door leading into the wing of the mansion in the shadow of whose walls crouched the buccaneers without.

Setting down the lamp he did approach the book-case upon one side of the room, but it was not to take therefrom a volume, as he had said, but to touch a secret spring, which caused the case to swing open like a door, revealing behind it a narrow portal in the wall.

This door also yielded to a touch on a secret spring, and taking up the lamp the midnight marauder descended a stone stairway to the cellars below.

The light showed it to be a stone vault, around the walls of which were rows of kegs and boxes, a seaman's chest and stacks of arms.

"Here is my treasure, and it is worth the entire gold," he said, eagerly, raising the lid of the chest, and taking therefrom bags of jewels of all kinds, for on labels attached were marked "Diamonds," "Rubies," "Pearls," "Opals," "Sapphires," and so on.

Into a leathern sachel he wore beneath his cloak, and fastened around his neck, he thrust the bags of gems, and then hastening across the stone vault unbolted and unbarred a massive iron door, in which the key turned with a shrieking sound that startled him, and which had been evidently unused for long years.

As the door swung heavily back the tall, cloaked form of the Corsair leader stood at the threshold, the light of the lamp falling full upon him, displaying a darkly-bronzed face, stern, calm, fearless and strikingly perfect in every feature.

It was a strangely youthful face, too—under twenty-five. A dark-brown mustache sheltered his mouth, upon which rested a sneer, as if called there by his own ignoble part in the midnight marauding, and his dark, piercing eyes were bent upon Don Manuel, with a look of commingled contempt and sternness.

"Well, señor, the treasure lies there in those kegs and boxes."

"And your share of the stealings?"

"I have them safe."

"I believe you. There, men, is your booty; take it up and be off to the schooner. Mind you, no noise or confusion."

The men entered, and in silence one by one raised the heavy kegs of gold and filed out of the vault, the chief and Don Manuel standing by in silence.

But, as the last keg was raised upon a pirate's brawny shoulder, there came a cry from the room above:

"Help! Ninetta, help! There are robbers in the vaults below!"

CHAPTER II.

THE CHEVALIER CORSAIR.

"HASTEN there, you snails! I'll check pursuit," cried the chief, and he sprang up the stone stairway, down which now streamed a flood of light from the room above.

As he bounded, cutlass in hand, into the chamber he started back, for before him, a pistol in her hand, and her eyes flashing, he beheld the beautiful form of Stella Enderos, her eyes flashing, her bosom heaving, for she was determined in her father's absence to protect her father's riches.

"Hail a lady here?" and the chief started back in surprise, lowering his cutlass and doffing his pumed hat.

"Ay, señor, a lady here—the Señorita Stella Enderos," she answered, proudly.

"Is it so that Don Ivan Enderos has a daughter?" asked the chief, completely amazed.

"Yes, I am his daughter; and what do you here, señor?"

"That question were hard to answer to you, señorita," he said, in an embarrassed way.

"And yet I demand an answer, señor, for my cousin, Don Manuel Hernandez, came hither this night to visit my father's library, and I find now, instead of him, yourself, and hear the clink of gold, the clash of arms and the voices of men in the vaults below."

"It is, alas! too true, lady; but I knew not that Don Ivan had a daughter to share his wealth, and not of one *peso* shall you be robbed."

"Robbed! In the name of the Virgin Mother, who are you?" she cried, in alarm.

"Men call me a pirate, lady," came in the deep, sad tones of the chief.

"A pirate? Oh, God have mercy, for I am lost!" and the young girl swooned away and sunk in a heap upon the floor.

The chief would have sprung to her side and raised her up, but just then a buccaneer dashed into the room, crying, eagerly:

"Come, señor chief, they have signaled the fort in some way; the bugles are calling boots and saddles, and already we hear the tramp of cavalry."

With a smothered oath, and a glance at the unconscious maiden, the chief bounded from the room, darted out through the vault, and gave a loud rallying cry to his men, who, excepting those who had borne away the treasure, awaited him.

"Where is Don Hernandez?" he cried.

"He has fled, señor."

"That gold must not go on the schooner, for that accursed Spaniard has deceived me as well as proving traitor to his kindred. One of you go, and bid Lieutenant Costello to leave that treasure on the cliff, while I check pursuit from yonder coming dragons," and calling his men around him, he dashed forward toward the orange grove, around which wound the road leading to the mansion; then he hastily arranged his crew to beat back the first onslaught of the soldiers, after which they could retreat to the schooner before the troops rallied.

As they left the mansion a man dashed out of the vault, and then another, and each bore in his arms a heavy burden.

Keeping in the shadow of the mansion, for a while, they skirted the foliage to the right, and across the lawn from the orange grove, in which were gathered the buccaneers, and running with great speed, soon gained the cliff, and then the schooner, which now had her sails set, and huge sweeps out, ready to depart.

As they entered the cabin with their burdens, the lights shone upon the faces of Don Manuel Hernandez, and a swarthy-visaged seaman of the schooner, and in their arms they held human forms.

Hardly had they reached the schooner before there resounded above volleys of pistol-shots and the shouts of combatants; after which there was a silence for a few moments, proving that the troopers had been surprised and beaten back.

Then on the cliff above was heard the ringing voice of the chief, shouting:

"Ho, the schooner!"

"Ay, ay, señor," answered the lieutenant, who had returned with the treasure-bearers.

"Is all ready to cast off?"

"Ay, ay, sir; only awaiting you and the men."

"Then on to the deck, men, and lose no time, for these troopers are but momentarily checked. Ho, Señor Costello!" he again called out, as the men clambered down the steep hillside.

"Ay, ay, señor."

"Where is that gold?"

"Safe in the hold, sir, and the hatches closed."

"Maledictions! Did you not receive my orders to leave it ashore?"

"No such orders came to me, señor."

"Open the hatches, and—hold! the troopers are coming," and checking his order, as the shouts of the charging soldiers, now reinforced, were heard, he quickly descended the side of the cliff, and gave orders, as he sprang upon the deck, to cast loose from the rocks.

The sweeps moved the schooner clear, and the topsails filling with the breeze that swept over the hilltops, she glided off from the land, just as the summit of the cliff became black with human forms, while the darkness was illumined by the flash of the pistols, fired after the retreating vessel.

But the shots fell harmless upon the decks, and, getting an offing, the wind filled the sails; then, like a bird, the schooner flew out of the little bay, just as the deep boom of a gun was heard, and another, and another, until three had been fired in quick succession.

"Those guns are from the fort, and they are signaling the Spanish cruisers in the harbor up the coast," announced the chief.

"And there go the answering signals," replied Conrado Costello, the lieutenant, as the distant boom of cannon was heard.

"Yes, and we'll have to make the schooner fly, for we've got leagues to go before we reach open water. Steady as you are, helmsman!" and the chief walked aft to take his place beside the man at the wheel, when from the cabin came a piercing cry that made him start, and bounding out of the companionway, the light streaming full upon her, was Stella Enderos!

"Great God! you on board this craft, lady!" broke from the lips of the chief.

"Ay, sir, and, pirate though you be, I claim your mercy and protection from one whose heart is as black as Satan's," and the beautiful girl dropped upon her knees and raised her clasped hands, just as Don Manuel Hernandez appeared in the companionway behind her, and said, angrily:

"Señor chief, that lady is my cousin and under my protection."

"No, no, no! A wild beast would be more merciful than he," cried the maiden.

"Rise, señorita, for I claim the right to protect you, and I pledge you that on this deck, though an outlaw flag floats at the peak, you are as safe as in your father's care."

"Oh, Heaven bless you, señor! But take back the words you spoke, in my home, and tell me that you are not a cruel buccaneer," and she laid her hand upon his arm.

"Alas! lady, I can but tell the truth; *men call me Belmont, the Buccaneer.*"

"Heaven defend me!" groaned the girl, and Don Manuel said, sneeringly:

"Now, cousin mine, you will admit that I am your protector."

"No, a thousand times no! Manuel Hernandez, for it was you that brought me here, and into your hands, señor, confessed pirate though you be, I intrust myself and my honor to your keeping."

"And I pledge both shall be sacred," and turning to Don Manuel Hernandez, he continued:

"Señor, as you are an unexpected guest aboard my vessel, Lieutenant Costello will assign you a berth in the ward-room, while my cabin shall be wholly at the service of your cousin as long as she remains upon this schooner."

"You shall rue this act, señor chief, for you act now with me in your power; but the tables may be turned, and then—"

"I will have no threats, Captain Hernandez. You deceived me in this night's dirty work, for I knew not that Don Ivan Enderos had a daughter, or I would never have consented to this dastard deed, as I make no war against women; and, lady, you and the gold we took from you, shall all be restored to your home in safety."

"A pirate, and yet a chevalier!" murmured Stella Enderos, in a low tone, while a discontented murmur arose from the crew, for they had heard the words of their chief.

He heard the threatening murmur, too, and turned quickly toward them.

"Devils! do you threaten me, too? Who dares raise his voice on this vessel against my will?"

Not a voice replied; all remained silent, and again the chief spoke:

"I pledge myself to this lady to return herself and her father's gold to his keeping; does any man dare dispute my will?"

Again no reply, and offering his hand to Stella, after glancing over the crew with piercing look, he led her into the cabin, where Nietta, the quadroon, crouched upon the floor, bewailing the fate of her mistress and herself.

CHAPTER III.

TO THE RESCUE!

THAT I may present to you, dear reader, the hero of my romance, at a time before the brand of buccaneer was upon his brow, I revert to the past, when life held for him honorable aspirations and ambitious hopes which cruel Destiny dragged down into the dust, and stained with ignominy a proud and noble name.

One pleasant afternoon, two years or more before the opening of this romance, a large fleet of coasting vessels were swiftly sailing through Long Island Sound, and heading for the narrow pass between Hart's Island and Land's Point, which form the entrance to the majestic sheet of water known as East river, and which at the time of which I write was much dreaded by mariners, on account of the fearful whirlpools, boiling surges and ragged rocks that have won the appropriate name of Hell Gate, for, with the wild velocity of a swollen cataract, it threatened death and wreck to the seamen who dared its dangers and foaming caldrons.

As the far-stretching fleet approached the pass the numerous sails drew closer and closer together, like a flock of snowy birds seeking their cotes, and the sailors upon the different craft could admire the beauty of the graceful vessels near them, and express their joy or regret at their own speed as they glided ahead or fell astern of some rival.

In the van was a large and graceful brig, carrying clouds of canvas and steadily gaining upon the fleet; from fore-castle to truck a mass of canvas towered aloft; even her flying royal was set, so anxious was her skipper to hold his own with the scores of vessels in her wake, and all of which were striving hard to lead the way.

Sloops, with heavy mainsails and gaff topsails spread to the breeze, coasters with all set that would draw, and large and small schooners extending their wide broad sheets, strug-

gled for the mastery, for night was coming on, and the merchant fleet hoped to drop anchor in the still waters of the river fronting the city before darkness should settle down upon land and sea.

The breeze was steady and blew six knots to a swift sailer, though the brig in the van and one other vessel were making seven out of it, and from the way the latter, a clipper-built schooner, sped along it was evident that she would not remain long among the lagging sailers, for steadily had she overhauled one after the other of the convoy, leaving them astern to gallantly pass others ahead, until, finally, she gained a position near the nimble leader of the squadron.

Stretched to its utmost tension the schooner's canvas forced her through the water at a speed that threatened to leave the brig astern, and seeing this the latter crowded on more sail as she headed for the usual channel between the island and the main.

Observing the action of the brig's skipper the schooner shook out her topsails, and gaining rapidly entered the narrowest part of the channel to windward and abeam of her, the masterly maneuver of her commander gaining a cheer from the crews of the other vessels.

Continuing to sail abreast for a short while, they approached a point where the main channel wound to the left, toward the mainland, from which a reef of rocks divided it, and beyond which was a narrow and dangerous passage never attempted by large vessels.

Keeping through the safer channel the brig threw her fleet rival again astern, by the bend in her course; but in an instant the schooner's studding-sails were hauled in board, her flying jib was set, her fore and main sheets were hauled aft, and, putting her helm hard up, she suddenly changed her course and headed for the narrow and dangerous pass between the ridge of rocks and the main, as though to head the brig off before she could get through the winding channel.

Another cheer of admiration, even joined in by the crew of the brig, greeted the schooner's daring maneuver, and then, in silence, the two beautiful vessels held on their way, leaving a snowy wake astern.

After a sail of some minutes the two craft again approached each other, at the point where the rocky pass and the open channel met; the schooner now was half a length ahead, and steering boldly forward as though intending to cross the bows of her rival and run her aboard.

This maneuver was observed with considerable alarm, not only by the crew of the brig, but by a gentleman and young girl who stood upon the quarter-deck, and had been admiring the golden beauty of the afternoon, and racing of the many vessels.

The gentleman and the maiden were passengers on the brig, from Boston and bound to New York, and were Don Henrico Enderos, a Southern planter of Spanish descent, and his lovely daughter, Edna, on their way to their home in the South, after a few months of travel in the Eastern States.

"Captain, yonder bold craft will surely fall afoul of us if he steers that course," declared Don Henrico, turning to the captain of the brig, a blunt, weather-beaten man of forty, who had eyed the schooner closely, from her first appearance in sight.

"No fear about him, sir, after he has had the luck to run safely through the 'Devil's Bite,' where I was certain he would knock off his fore-foot; but he carried all sail like the Flying Dutchman in a gale, and he can keep his dainty craft clear of my brig's bows," and he resumed his gaze at the beautiful vessel, which was more like a pleasure-yacht in grace and symmetry than a craft built for service, for her hull was long, narrow, and sat low in the water, while her bows were sharp, and, extending far beyond them, was a needle-like bowsprit.

Her masts were single sticks, and her square fore and mainsails were large enough for a vessel of double her tonnage, which was about a hundred tons, and with her jib and flying-jib, and gaff topsails, it was evident that she was built for speed rather than burden.

Upon her decks every rope was coiled and in perfect place; only half a dozen seamen were visible, and they stood idly leaning over her high bulwarks and gazing upon the brig.

She carried no colors, and upon her quarter-deck were seen two young men, evidently officers, for they were in undress uniform. The elder of the two held the wheel, and had been the pilot who had managed his vessel in so masterly a manner.

As Edna Enderos turned her eyes upon the helmsman she observed that he was a tall, slender young man, with broad shoulders, and a form that denoted both strength and activity, while his face was dark, exceedingly handsome, and fearless in a degree that denoted reckless daring.

Interested in watching the officers and crew of the strange and beautiful schooner, all momentarily forgot on the brig the danger that threatened, until Don Henrico called out suddenly:

"He will dare to attempt crossing our bows, captain."

It was evident that the skipper thought so now, for he called out in ringing tones:

"Luff! luff, I say! or we will run you down!"

The young helmsman smiled, waved his hand, and held steadily on his course, while the captain shouted:

"Blast their timbers, I've a mind to cut their fancy craft in two."

"But the brig's danger, captain," said Don Henrico.

"That's it; but I'll hold on a little yet."

The two vessels were now nearing each other rapidly, and it was certain that, if one or the other did not change its course, a collision was inevitable. Seeing this Don Henrico cried:

"Captain, I beg you to change your course, or both vessels will go down."

The captain saw that in a moment more it would be too late, glanced at the smiling and daring young helmsman, and well knew that there was no back down in him; then he shouted in angry tones to the man at the brig's wheel:

"Hard! hard up, hard! Cast off the weather-braces! Let fly everything!"

The brig slowly swung off from the wind, with the bows landward, and just in time, or the two vessels would have come together; but it was clear that the schooner's daring helmsman had expected this move on the part of the brig's captain, for he put the schooner directly in the wind's eye and laid her alongside the merchant craft with a skill and precision that won admiration from all, and in an instant the two craft were locked together fore and aft.

Springing from the bows of his vessel into the main-chains of the brig, the schooner's commander saluted the merchant captain politely, smiling pleasantly when the latter said:

"You are a skillful seaman, young man, but I would like to know by what right you board my vessel in the manner you have done?"

"In a word you shall know, my dear captain; you have on board a prisoner, a man under death sentence, and who is to be executed the day after his arrival in New York?"

"I have, sir; but, how does that interest you, may I ask?"

"Simply that I have been in chase of you since leaving Boston, to take that prisoner out of your keeping," was the calm reply.

"Never, sir! That man was placed in my charge as a Government prisoner, and I will not yield him up," angrily replied the merchant captain.

"But you must, my dear captain," was the equally firm response.

"Never, sir."

"We shall see, captain."

"Ay, that shall we see. Ho! men to the rescue, for we have been boarded by a pirate," and the captain's voice rung out loud and clear, while the dozen men upon the brig rushed aft to aid their commander.

CHAPTER IV.

RUNNING A DEATH GANTLET.

"Ho, men! to the rescue here! A pirate! a pirate!" again called out the merchant captain, and his crew at once answered by a shout and a rush aft, while Don Henrico placed his arm around Edna, as though to defend her with his life; but, though her face whitened at this fearful discovery the brig's commander had made, she showed no other sign of fear.

Though the brig's men were evidently bent on resistance, and their captain stood at bay, a pistol leveled at the heart of the daring young man who had just been branded as a pirate, the schooner's chief stood calm and fearless, a smile even hovering upon his handsome face, until he saw that it really was the intention of the sailors to attack him; then his voice rung out in stern, commanding tones:

"Hold!"

Though apparently unarmed, and alone upon an enemy's deck, when the stern order was spoken, and but one word left his lips, the crew that were pressing upon him obeyed instantly, and with a quiet smile the young man then added:

"Do not crowd me, lads, for one word from me will bring thirty gallant sea-dogs, from the hold of yonder schooner, who will not see me roughly dealt with." Then he once more turned to the brig's skipper:

"Captain, I made a request of you, and now I demand the state prisoner to whom I referred; will you surrender him to me peacefully, for I dislike to use harsh means, and yet I will take him."

"Men, he has no one to back him, other than the half-dozen you see, so overboard with him!" and the captain made a move as though to carry out his intention, when, with a nimble spring, the young sailor placed his back against the bulwarks, his hands were thrust into the bosom of his shirt and returned with pistols in them, and a long, shrill whistle resounded from his lips.

"Back! don't crowd me, or I will kill you!"

The threatening command was unheeded, for the brig's skipper pressed forward, his men were

at his back; when instantly a sharp report followed, a heavy fall of a body upon the deck, and with shouts and stamping feet, over a score of daring young seamen bounded upon the brig, driving its crew back as before an irresistible avalanche.

A few shots were fired, a few clashes of steel against steel were heard, and several human forms lay upon the deck, dead or dying; then silence reigned upon the scene, for the crew of the schooner had carried the brig.

Bidding one of his officers hold the deck, the schooner's commander turned toward the cabin, when he was suddenly confronted by Don Henrico and Edna, the latter pale and trembling, for so unexpectedly and suddenly had she been brought face to face with a scene of carnage, she was unnerved.

"Pardon, lady," and the dashing young sailor raised his cap politely, "for the alarm I have caused you; but this brig holds a prize for me that I have risked much to gain; but I will disturb you no more, and depart."

He passed into the cabin, and a moment after returned, but not alone, for he was accompanied by a young man, a few years his senior, with a dark, foreign face, striking appearance, but pale, haggard look.

With heavy irons upon ankles and wrists the prisoner walked with difficulty; but, aided by two seamen, he was soon upon the schooner's deck. Once more the young captain turned to Don Henrico and Edna—the former bending over the dead body of the brig's skipper, who had been the first to fall in the fray.

"Now, lady, adieu, and again I ask pardon for the fright I have given you."

The young girl made no reply, but Don Henrico said, sternly:

"You have run your neck into the hangman's noose, sir, by this day's work."

"It may be, sir; I wanted no bloodshed, but it was forced upon me, and now I must take the consequences, be they what they may," and, raising his cap, he turned and bounded upon his own deck.

The schooner was now in a dangerous position, as the entire fleet of vessels astern, surmising trouble to the brig, were either hastening to the rescue, or lying to and landing boats filled with armed men.

"Up with the flag, union down!" cried the mate of the brig, as the schooner's captain left his deck, and the signal of distress was answered by loud shouts from the crews of the other vessels.

"Cast her clear!" came in the trumpet tones of the young captain, as his foot touched his quarter-deck, and once more he sprang to the wheel.

"All clear, sir!" sung out an officer, and as the schooner swung off from the wind, every brace and sheet was hauled close, and the obedient vessel shot under the brig's stern.

"We cannot run back, sir, through the fleet, for there are half a hundred boats in the water to intercept us," and the second officer of the schooner pointed to the hostile demonstrations of the fleet.

"You are right, and we cannot weather the head of the reef and run back as we came, beyond the ledge; but we can venture yonder rocky pass," was the cool rejoinder, and the commander pointed to a deep, narrow opening through two huge rocks, and leading from the main channel into the dangerous one he had so skillfully run in his chase of the brig.

"It is a desperate chance, sir," declared the lieutenant.

"Desperate indeed, but not hopeless, and if the wind holds good, and the schooner knows her danger, we will just make it, and no more."

"There is not a foot to spare on either side, sir."

"I know it, but I shall risk it, for once back into that channel we can show the boats our heels," and the young captain turned a searching glance around him, which revealed the fact that the whole fleet was now bent upon the capture of the schooner, all realizing the desperate danger the rovers were in, and that if they did not pass back through the boats, they must run on through Hell Gate to the city, where, if hot chase were given, the forts would scent danger and bring the daring craft to or sink her.

"Haul taut every bowline and brace, until they are like harp-strings! Give not an inch of play! Every man throw his weight to leeward! Now, steady all!" called out the young commander, and when his orders were obeyed, and the schooner was dashing along swiftly, and heading for the narrow pass between the rocks, he added, calmly:

"Now, good craft, do your duty, for we can do no more for you."

As though a thing of life, and fully realizing her danger, the schooner held unswervingly on her course, her sharp bowsprit pointed for the rocky pass; but should she fall off a point or the wind fail her, the only alternative would be to fight her way through the fleet and boats where there was not a shadow of chance for success.

"She is dropping off, sir; the wind is failing her," said the lieutenant in a loud whisper, so great was the tension to which all on board were wrought up to.

"I see it; we must fight our way through the boats or put her before the wind and boldly run by the city. Stand by all!"

But, as the words left his lips the wind, as though to aid the daring young rover, freshened a little, and a cheer burst from the crew as the needle-like bowsprit once more pointed through the dangerous pass. All held their breath to await the result, for a minute more would seal the schooner's fate.

And then came the instant of awful suspense, the second which would decide all. Even the boats paused to watch the result; but the firm hand on the wheel gave no tremor, the eyes never flinched—the graceful schooner shot through the gantlet of death, the ragged rock to leeward just scraping her hull!

From her decks arose an exultant shout; the sails were freed to the breeze, and like a frightened deer the beautiful craft bounded away toward the open sound, while the disappointed pursuers poured volleys of musketry and oaths upon her as she swept along with a flowing sheet, saved by the skill and daring of her gallant commander; but what misery had not that one deed laid up for him in coming years?

Let the sequel show.

CHAPTER V.

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL.

THE waters of Boston Bay were unruffled even by the shadow of a breeze, and numerous vessels "homeward bound," from the stately cruiser to the chebacca boat of the humble fisherman, were idly resting upon the mirror-like surface, which reflected in its deep depths every spar, sail and rope, and the dark green islands that here and there dotted the calm bosom of the deep.

A golden sunset illumined the scene and cast gorgeous hues over water and sky, and rays of silver, purple and gold were reflected from the domes, towers and spires of the distant city, from which came, lazily floating over the waters, the din of traffic, the rattle of wheels and iron hoofs upon the stony pavement.

Some of the fleet, left motionless upon the waters by the dying of the wind, had their sails brailed up, hanging in festoons from the yards, while others let them hang to catch the first breath of the welcome breeze.

Among the numerous vessels thus lazily drifting upon the bosom of the rippleless bay, were a large lean-hulled sloop-of-war, bearing the stains of long and rude buffetings with the waves and winds, and a rakish-looking schooner, whose beauty of outline attracted universal admiration from all in the fleet, and caused many comments as to her character.

Her sails were stained and tattered by long use, her hull had turned to a hue of brown, and there was a general look about the craft that betokened a long and rough voyage; but this look could not detract from her beauty of outline, her long, raking, slender masts, and a saucy air that indicated speed and rare sea-going qualities.

Upon her decks were visible but half a dozen men, with woolen shirts, red caps and swarthy faces that indicated their foreign nationality, and it was generally surmised that the craft was a fruit-trader from the West Indies.

Upon the handsome sloop-of-war the schooner created as much admiration as among the merchant craft, and a young officer, who had been watching her, as she lay a couple of cables' lengths astern of the cruiser, remarked:

"Lieutenant Sylvester, in spite of the trader look about yonder saucy craft, I can but think she has not always sailed under an honest flag."

"You have expressed my opinion, Nevil, and if she was lying in a port of the West Indies I would watch out for her, expecting to see the darkness bring half a hundred men out of her hold," replied the handsome young lieutenant, who was the second in command of the sloop-of-war, and he approached the midshipman whose suspicions had been aroused by the rakish look of the strange vessel.

"Had I not better take a boat and have a look at the saucy craft, sir?" continued the dashing midshipman.

"Oh, no, Walter; we are not in the Indies now, where everything has a suspicious look, but in the bay of practical old Boston. Our pirate-hunting in southern waters has made you suspicious of every craft you cannot see through," answered Harold Sylvester, with a smile.

"It may be, sir; but, if yonder craft don't mean mischief, I'll give my grog to the captain's cook. In spite of her old sails and rigging, and weather-stained hull, I'm confident I've seen her before, and that under full sail getting out of the way of this good ship we now stand on."

"It may be, Nevil; but she's in an honest trade now, it seems, and, unless she gives us some good cause, we must believe her to be what she seems, a West Indian fruit-trader," and Lieutenant Sylvester turned away, leaving the suspicious midshipman still gazing upon the pretty schooner.

And thus he stood until the hues of sunset blended with the twilight, and

"The crescent moon sailed boldly into the ether, Convoyed by fleets of stars upon her way; Whilst, wrapped in slumber deep the earth beneath her Was sleeping off the fever of the day."

And with the coming of the goddess of night came the first "paw" of the evening breeze, sending first the vessels furthest seaward along over the rippling waters, and then the others abreast of the pyramid known as "Nix Mate," and thus on with those nearer shore, until chebacca boat, pilot craft, cruiser and schooner were all moving along toward the city, whose lamps cast a thousand glimmering rays across the waters.

"Now, Lieutenant Sylvester, just look at that craft; she is walking right by us as saucily and gracefully as a Cuban belle at a Yankee ball," called out Walter Nevil, the midshipman, as the strange schooner, catching the breeze, bowed to its welcome presence, and, in spite of the speed of the man-of-war, threatened soon to throw her slippers in the cruiser's teeth.

"She's a nimble craft, Nevil, I admit, and if she has made as good time on her cruise northward as she does now with the breeze, her skipper will reap a rich harvest from his cargo."

But the midshipman shook his head dubiously, for he had made up his mind that the schooner was a suspicious visitor in a New England harbor, and he kept his eye upon her, even after she passed the castle ahead of the cruiser, and dropped anchor in an open way, free from the other crafts around, as though not wishing to be crowded.

Still gazing, as though fascinated by the weather-stained but beautiful craft, and his own misgivings, Walter Nevil saw the schooner come to anchor with sails still set, and a few moments after beheld a small boat leave her side and row shoreward.

And the occupant in this boat, for it contained but one person, with an author's prerogative we will follow.

Had Midshipman Walter Nevil been able to follow the little yawl to an old ruined pier at the foot of Copp's Hill and see the person who sprung ashore, he would indeed have had cause for suspicion, for he was no West Indian sailor with dark brows, swarthy face and seaman's dress, but a tall, well-formed man, wearing a heavy cloak and a slouch hat that shadowed his face completely.

After climbing the abrupt bank, he came to the burying-ground, that covers the whole hill-top, and entered it by a stile, for the path he followed wound among the graves to the open space beyond.

As though unawed by the presence of the dead, he stood and gazed around him, first at the graves, and then at the moonlit scene of sail-dotted harbor and lighted town—the distant hills and meadows northward, and Bunker Hill towering aloft to the left, the low fields to the westward, with the Charles river, winding like a silver belt around them, and to the south the village of Dorchester—all these, scenes familiar to his eyes in childhood, came under his scope dimly.

With a sigh he turned away to continue his walk, when involuntarily he started, and dropped his hand upon a weapon beneath his cloak, as a white form, looking weird-like and ghostly in the moonlight, arose before him.

But a glance showed him that it was a young girl, robed in pure white, and with the moonlight falling upon her pale face, and a bunch of flowers she held in her hand.

"Pardon me, lady, for I meant not to disturb you at the grave of some loved one, and scarcely expected to find the living here among the dead."

He spoke in a low tone, but his words caused the maiden to start, and then spring toward him, as though to throw herself into his arms; but, checking the impulse, she cried:

"Oh, why have you come here to this sacred spot, Victor De Lisle?"

"Great God! Marian Dalton!"

The words seemed wrung from him, rather than uttered, and he raised his hands to his head in a dazed way.

"Yes, Victor De Lisle, I am Marian Dalton, and I stand by the grave of my father," she said, sadly, and he stood an instant in silence, and then answered with touching pathos:

"Your father dead, Marian? I knew him not, but for your sake I mourn him, though I feel that my own deeds have driven me out of your heart forever."

"Ay, Victor De Lisle, forever, for I can feel no love for you when a grave is between us—a grave you made, for your hand took my father's life."

"No! no! no! say not so, Marian, for your father and I never met."

"Would to God you spoke the truth; but stand not on this sacred spot and add falsehood to crime, Victor De Lisle, for you shot down my father upon his own deck, because he attempted to defend the prisoner intrusted to his care, and that act made you an outlaw from your land, and has branded you with the name of pirate."

"Oh God! bitter is this blow, that now falls with crushing weight upon me! But here,

above your father's ashes, Marian, here, upon this sacred spot, I swear to you that I knew not that the captain of the brig was your father—"

"Hold!"

"Hear me, Marian: I gave chase to the brig, not even knowing her name, but aware that she held Conrado Costello a prisoner on board, doomed to die. I sought to gain him without force, but was attacked, and in self-defense I fired. You know the rest, and I know now, Marian, that my dream of love is over forever, for I had hoped against hope that you had remembered me in my wanderings, and had not, as others have done, branded me as a pirate, and thus hoping I sought this spot once more, at the risk of my life, and was going to your home yonder over the hill, longing to see you, and also up to North Square to see the old home once more, and look again upon my father's face; but alas! Marian, all hope goes from me now, and I dare not even ask your forgiveness."

"I forgive you, Victor, but I can never forget; from the day you fired the fatal shot that placed my poor father here, our paths in life divided, for how can his slayer ever be aught to me?"

"My poor, poor father, after three long years' voyage in foreign seas, came home again, merely touching at Boston to land the mail, and receive passengers, and then stood on for New York to meet his doom at your hand—the hand I believed and hoped was to lead me through life; but I dare not now dwell on the past, Victor, and the future holds for me no hope, only sorrow. Farewell, and let it be a last farewell."

She held forth her hand to prove she had forgiven him, but he dared not trust himself to touch it, and with a smothered groan he walked rapidly away, and watching him she saw him disappear in the gloom of distance.

A walk of some minutes, mechanically finding his way, for with bowed head he seemed overwhelmed with grief, brought Victor De Lisle to a grand mansion, surrounded by large, ornamental grounds.

Entering the gate he ascended the steps and turning the knob found the door was open, and he stepped into the dimly-lighted hall. Cautiously he crossed to the other end, to pause before a door, as though dreading to enter; but summoning up courage he turned the knob, and softly entered.

It was a large, handsomely-furnished room, and upon all sides rested an air of luxury and comfort; a lamp burned upon a center-table, and, seated in an easy-chair reading, was an old man, with gray hair and dignified bearing.

"Is that you, Mabel?" asked the old gentleman, without raising his eyes from his book.

"No, father, it is I, your unhappy son."

With a cry the old man sprung to his feet, dashing the book to the floor, and turned upon the one whose acts, a year before, had brought dishonor to his proud name.

"You are no son of mine, Victor De Lisle."

The words came slowly and distinctly, and the burning eyes were riveted upon the returned son, who stood with bowed head before his aged father in silence; but at length he cried in pleading tones:

"Oh, say not that, for I am not as guilty as you believe."

"Ay, guilty you are; your hands are stained with the blood of the father of the woman you professed to love; you are branded as an outlaw, a murderer, ay, and worse—a pirate."

"No, no, no, father! I am not that! An outcast I am, a murderer if so you will it, but I sail under no pirate flag, for I am a commander in the Carthaginian navy."

"A navy of outlaws, another name for piracy—ha! here comes your sister to witness your shame, and point the finger of scorn upon you."

A light step was heard without, the door swung open, and a young and beautiful girl appeared in the doorway, and, at sight of the tall, cloaked form, shrunk back, while the white-haired old father, in ringing tones, cried:

"Mabel, my poor child, there stands your pirate brother!"

CHAPTER VI.

A FATHER'S CURSE.

FOR a moment Mabel De Lisle stood like a statue, pale, staring, silent, while her father pointed scornfully toward his son, and repeated his words:

"There stands your pirate brother!"

She shrunk back, as though in dread, but, noticing the look of pain that crossed the dark, handsome face, and seeing his outstretched arms, she sprung toward him, crying:

"No, no, father! Victor has never become as bad as that, and he never can."

"God bless you, sister, for those words!" came in choking tones from the brother, and, infolding her in his strong arms, he imprinted a kiss upon her forehead, and said:

"Bless you for not shrinking from me, Mabel, after all the dishonor the world has put upon my name."

"Crushed by misfortune, because I did that one act to rescue my more than brother, as I believed him, Conrado Costello, who had been

condemned to die, I was branded as an outlaw—ay, as a pirate; but, I meant only to take him out of the clutches of the law and save his life from the gallows, for I did not believe him guilty of the murder of which he was accused."

"And yet, the law so decided him to be, sir," said his father, sternly.

"The law has hanged many an innocent man, sir; I admit that circumstances pointed strongly to Conrado as the murderer of Professor Doane, after the quarrel they had; but, my friend was a Mexican, in a foreign land; public opinion was hard against him; he was sentenced to death; and, determined not to let him die, I took my own yacht, manned her with some gallant spirits, and took him off the brig, but, unfortunately, not without bloodshed, though I only acted in self-defense."

"That act sent me a wanderer upon the seas, and I cast my lot, my sword, and my vessel with the Carthaginians, and yet am hunted down and branded as a pirate by my own countrymen—ay, by my own father!"

"Yes, I so brand you, for you are no son of mine!" came from the white lips of the old man.

"Father! father! say not so, I entreat you, for I came here this night, at the risk of my life, to see you and Mabel; ay, disguised my vessel as a trading-schooner, and ran into port to find, alas! that it was Captain Dan Dalton who had commanded the brig, and to hear from Marian's own lips, and at the very grave of her father, that I was his murderer."

"Oh, have pity upon me, father, and cast me not utterly out of your heart!"

"And I implore you, too, father," said Mabel, with pleading voice and look, still clinging to her brother.

"Never! You are no son of mine, sir, and more, I bestow upon you a father's curse."

"No, no, no!"

"I say yes! Go! Leave this roof, forever; and go at once, or I will be tempted to call the police and turn you over to them as a pirate."

"Father, listen to me, I implore you!" and Mabel threw herself before the stern old man.

"Not one word will I hear! Go, sir, or I will call for help, and never stretch forth a hand to save you from the gallows."

A look of intense pain passed over the face of the unfortunate son, and he said, in a low tone:

"Your duties as judge, sir, would doubtless cause you to sign my death-sentence for piracy; but, though I fear not death in battle, I shrink from it in ignominy, and worse still, from allowing a father to condemn his own son to die; but I forgive you, sir, as you are the author of my being, and now I bid you forever farewell."

He turned sadly away, but Mabel sprung into his arms with a low moan, and her weight proved to him that she had fainted. He laid her upon a sofa, kissing her white, upturned face once, twice, thrice.

A moment after he had gone from the home of his boyhood, and in an hour after his fleet schooner was flying out of the harbor of Boston, while her crew were working like beavers, taking down the dingy sails and rigging new, and tearing the canvas coverings from off the black hull, which had so disguised the beautiful craft.

"An outcast, indeed, from home, land, and the hearts of my kindred," groaned the unhappy young sailor captain, as he leaned over the taffrail, and beheld the lights of Boston swiftly fading from his vision.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HUNCHBACK'S CAPTIVE.

"SAVE me, sir, oh save me!"

The cry in a woman's voice, and musical in tone, though raised in dire alarm, rung out in the evening air, for the gray twilight was deepening into darkness, and obscuring the streets of New Orleans, to which the scene of my story now changes, on the last day of the fantastic and merry "Carnival" which from time immemorial has gladdened the hearts of the denizens of that strange city in the land of the orange and the cane.

The one from whose lips broke the pleading cry for help was a young girl, with white, scared face, and large, startled eyes fixed upon the masked visage of a man of huge stature, who held her firmly in his strong arms, as he fled toward the river, where was dimly visible a boat, or barge, containing half a dozen swarthy oarsmen.

Behind this flying personage, and his fair captive, for such she seemed, ran an individual of short, stout form, massive head, hunch back, and face also masked, while in stern, angry tones he urged his companion forward, for he saw that the call of the maiden had attracted the attention of the merry throng that tramped the streets, singing, laughing, and making the night ring with their joyous voices, for the carnival time was upon them, and old and young, rich and poor, the citizens had turned out *en masse* to indulge in pleasure to their heart's content.

Mingling with the merry sounds upon all sides, and it being a time of revelry, the maiden's shriek for aid had not attracted the atten-

tion it would have done at another time, and those who heard it, with one exception, looked upon it as the wild freak of some lover, bearing his sweetheart away in his arms, while her pleading for succor was looked upon as feigned.

But that one exception caught sight of the pale, frightened face, and heard the angry order of the hunchback:

"On! on, I say, or all will be lost in the moment of success."

"Save me, sir, oh save me!" pleaded the maiden, as she beheld a tall man, wearing a heavy cloak, and completely masked, pause, glance at her and her captors, and then hesitate, as though undecided what to do.

But her words reached his ears distinctly, and one glance into her face proved she was not a willing captive. Instantly he sprung forward and confronted the man who bore her, saying, firmly:

"Pardon, monsieur, but this lady claims my protection, and you must release her."

An angry curse arose to the man's lips, but without direct reply he would have passed on, when he was seized in a grasp of iron, his arms torn apart, and the maiden slid quickly to the ground with a fervent exclamation of joy at her escape.

"Señor, attend to this iron-handed fiend, and I will recover the lady," cried the discomfited man, appealing to the hunchback, who suddenly sprung forward with a cry of rage and aimed a blow with a sword directly at the head of the daring rescuer.

But the stranger raising his arm, holding a short blade in hand, skillfully parried the stroke, and at the same time sent his fist into the masked face of his deformed assailant with a force that sent him reeling to the earth.

Then, with the spring of a tiger, he was upon the man who had again seized the maiden, and hurled him upon the ground with an exhibition of strength that was remarkable, and elicited a round of bravas from the gay crowd that had gathered around, and who seemed to still look upon the whole affair as a part of the performance of Carnival time, which allowed licenses not to be tolerated under any other circumstances.

Rising quickly to his feet the hunchback again confronted the stranger, and said in fierce tones, though he made no effort to attack him:

"How dare you interfere with me, monsieur, in my innocent amusement?"

"By the right to protect that maiden, who claimed it of me," was the calm reply.

"It was but a joke, and for your interference you shall answer."

"So be it, sir: here is my card, and I am always answerable for my actions," and the stranger placed a card in the hunchback's hands, the crowd standing by and watching all with interest.

"Oh, sir, I have gotten you into trouble, for this man is a very devil when aroused," and the young girl, whom now all saw was beautiful in face and form, and trembling visibly, approached and laid her hand upon the arm of him who had befriended her.

"I care not if he be Satan himself, though I regret having mistaken your cry for one of real alarm."

"It was, sir, a cry for your aid, as that man and his hireling took advantage of Carnival time to take me by force from my home; but I recovered consciousness and removed the mask from my face and cried out, and to you I owe more than words can ever thank you for."

"The girl is mad; it was but a joke, and, monsieur, you will regret this night's work," said the hunchback, with suppressed passion, and he stepped toward the maiden, adding:

"Now come with me, Edna, or it will be the worse for you."

But the maiden shrunk from his touch, and turned quickly to her preserver, saying, imploringly:

"Oh, do not let him take me, sir."

"What right has he to demand that you go with him?"

"Oh, do not ask me, do not ask me; only save me from him," was the piteous answer.

"I will," and turning to the hunchback, he continued:

"This lady is under my protection, sir, and if you value that hideous form of yours you will stand aside and let us pass."

The allusion to his deformity seemed to drive the hunchback to frenzy, and again he sprung forward with drawn sword, a shriek upon his lips, as though the insult had transformed him into a madman.

But he was met as before with a parry of his blow, and once more was hurled to the earth with a force that stunned him, for he lay as one dead, while his comrade sprung forward and knelt by his side, seemingly not anxious to avenge his fallen friend.

"Now, lady, I will conduct you home; stand aside, please," and the crowd giving way, he passed through the opening made for him and his fair charge, and wended his way up the thronged and gayly-lighted streets, the maiden evidently leading his steps in the direction of her home.

CHAPTER VIII.
THE CREOLE BELLE.

IN one of the most palatial old mansions upon the Rue St. Luis, in New Orleans, and a few weeks prior to the scene that opens this story, a gentleman of noble and striking appearance paced the floor of his elegantly-furnished room, a look of joy upon his face.

Without, a storm was raging, and only a few wayfarers, drawn from their homes by stern necessity or duty, to face the pelting rain, were seen upon the streets, while within all was luxury and comfort, and the dignified occupant of the room paced to and fro, seemingly content with himself and the world in general.

"Yes," he murmured, "I feel, I know that he is dead, and the iron has gone out of my heart forever."

"But ah! what have I not suffered in all these years, hiding that dread secret, and dreading that the vows I then made would one day have to be kept; but, thank God, the time has gone by when he was to come, and I know by that that he is dead, rather than by the oaths of the paid wretches who have told me they put him out of the way; but, oh God! should he not be dead," and a livid hue crossed the face of the speaker, as though a dread of some great terror had risen before his vision; his lips remained firm set for awhile, and until broken in their sternness by a light laugh.

"Ha! ha! ha! the phantoms of the past, and expectant specters of the future, make a coward of me, and imagination brings up before me anticipations of evils that cannot come, for he sleeps in his grave. Ha! ha! ha! a grave with not one, not even a mother, to drop upon it one pitying tear. But I must smooth these troubles from my face, for I hear Edna's footstep on the stairs," and crossing the room, a smile upon his lips, he greeted a maiden, who just then crossed the threshold, and whose radiant beauty would have made glad the heart of an anchorite.

Though scarcely sixteen, if quite that age, Edna Enderos was possessed of an exquisite face and form that drove mad with envy the belles in her social circle, and caused men to bow down in almost adoration to her loveliness.

And as beautiful in character as in person, an heiress to the vast wealth of her father, and just across the threshold of womanhood, it was no wonder that she was the belle of the Creole City, and was sought by beaux innumerable.

Proud of his beautiful child Henrico Enderos certainly was, and the descendant of a Spanish grandee himself, it was whispered in the clubs that the father intended his daughter should become the wife of one of Spain's nobles only, though he had for years lived in America, and called himself an American.

Whatever the views of the father regarding Edna might be, they did not discourage the gallants of the Crescent City, and handsome young planters, rich bankers and wealthy Creoles sought untiringly to win favor in the maiden's eyes, and gain the consent of the beauty and heiress to cast aside the plans of her ambitious parent, and dwell in the sunshine of their love.

But, up to the time of the opening of my romance, Edna Enderos had shown no preference, though she had flirted, waltzed, and encouraged all of her admirers, yet kept her own heart fancy free.

"Edna, my child, it is too stormy to venture out to-night, so we will have to content ourselves at home, for which I am not sorry," and Don Henrico, as he was called, kissed his daughter upon her forehead, and led her to a seat.

"Nor am I sorry, father, for an evening at home alone with you is a rarity I cannot but enjoy, as I am *ennuied* with society and the flattery of men."

"Can you blame men, Edna, for telling you the truth?—for you are indeed the most beautiful woman, child though you be in years, in the entire city of New Orleans," said her father, with enthusiastic admiration.

"Spare me, father, I implore you, for I do not wish to have to say with Cæsar, 'And thou, too, Brutus!'" laughed the beauty, as she turned and took up a Spanish guitar, running her fingers idly, yet skillfully across the strings.

"You will have time to sing me a song, Edna, before tea is announced," said Don Henrico, and, without reply, she broke forth into the "Pirate's Serenade," her voice, rich, melodious and cultivated, ringing through every part of the house.

"That is a stirring air, my child, yet it is strange that you so like it, when it dwells upon piracy," observed the Don, when she had finished.

"It is my favorite, strange as it may seem, father, for I like its wild, reckless tone, and pirate though he be, I could admire one who would woo me in the same fearless, bold manner."

"Why, Edna! could you love a man you deemed a criminal?" asked her father, in a tone of surprise, and of slight displeasure.

"Oh, no, never a criminal, father, for a man must be indeed noble to win my regard; but, I could admire a bold, free rover who risked his life for gold he did not care for, and who had

not in his bosom a cruel heart, and could pity him for the sorrows and wrongs that had driven him to piracy," she answered, with considerable feeling.

"And, admiration and pity lead to love, Edna; beware!" answered her father.

"True, but then I need no warning, father, for the days of buccaneering are drawing to a close, and ere long the seas will not be shadowed by the flag of the free rover; but, come, Jacques has announced tea," and, slipping her tiny hand into her father's arm, she led the way into the supper-room, little dreaming that her idle words might prove anything but a jest, for, already, around her young life shadows were creeping to shape her destiny as Fate might direct, so

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends
Rough hew them how we will."

"There is a man in the parlor to see you, señor," and Jacques, the major domo of the Enderos mansion, looked into the supper-room.

"Who is it?" quietly asked the Don.

"I know not, señor."

"Ah, he is not one of our friends, then? but, I forget, you said a *man*, and not a gentleman."

"Yes, señor, a man, and yet one who has the face and form of a devil, for he is deformed and hideous to look upon."

Don Henrico had risen to his feet, but, at the words of Jacques he sunk back in his chair, his face white, his eyes staring, and his lips trembling, while he said, in a husky voice:

"A deformed body, and a hideous face, did you say?"

"Yes, señor," answered Jacques, in surprise at the emotion of his master, while Edna, in alarm, arose and approached her father.

"Oh, God! at last! at last!" and Don Henrico dropped his head upon the table, completely overcome with emotion.

CHAPTER IX.
THE DEFORMED FOE.

ALARMED at the deep emotion exhibited by her father, and seeming to recognize who it was that had called, Edna Enderos turned and asked, anxiously:

"Father! father, tell me what has so deeply moved you?"

"Do not ask me, my child," groaned the Don.

"Jacques, go and tell that person, whoever or whatever he may be, that my father desires not to see him," said Edna.

"Hold! do not tell him that, or—or—tell him I will see him at once; and, Jacques, mark well his face and form, and tell me of him when you return, for his coming has unnerved me, as I believed him dead, and he is very dear to me."

Apparently both Edna and Jacques were satisfied with this explanation, and the latter left the room while Edna made an effort to comfort her father.

Exerting his powerful will, and evidently determined to face whatever fate held in store for him, Don Henrico arose and threw off all signs of emotion, so that when the servant returned he was himself again, and asked, calmly:

"Well?"

"He is, as I said, sir, a very devil to look at, but his voice is as soft as a woman's, and his feet and hands are beautiful, as are also his eyes—"

"It is the one I believed dead. Asked he to see Don Henrico Enderos?"

"Yes, señor; he said, tell the Don an old and esteemed friend has risen from his grave and come to visit him."

"Ha! did I not say I believed him dead? You see now, Edna, and you, too, Jacques, that I had cause to be deeply moved; brandy here, sir!" and Don Henrico dashed off a glass half-full of brandy, and, removing all traces of emotion from his face, he walked out of the room smiling, and apparently unmoved by the coming of a visitor he had neither expected nor desired to see.

In the parlor, standing in the glare of the wax tapers in the massive chandelier, and gazing at a portrait upon the wall, a woman's face set within a handsome frame, was the individual whose coming had so moved Don Henrico.

What his age was were hard to tell, for he might be, as judged by his black hair, unwrinkled face and bright eyes, hardly twenty, and yet there was a look of sternness in the huge mouth, whose thick lips failed to hide the fangs, rather than teeth, that indicated perhaps two-score years and five had passed over his head.

And such a head! as large as a giant's, square, and set upon broad shoulders, deformed by a huge hump upon the back that almost destroyed all semblance of human shape.

And yet his deformed body and short, stout legs were richly clothed in fashionable attire, and in his shirt front gleamed a ruby pin, while a pearl of rare beauty was upon the little finger of his left hand.

His feet, incased in well-fitting boots, his hands, small and shapely, his hair, his complexion and his wondrous eyes were the redeeming points to look upon in this strange man, while his voice, as he spoke aloud to himself, and gazed upon the portrait, was melodious in its softness, though it had a disagreeable ring

in its tone, when the face seemed suddenly to awaken his fierce anger.

"The face of the one who was once all the world to me, and the artist has done his work well, for he has portrayed every beauty it possessed, even to the exquisite neck and shoulders," he said, in his soft, harmonious tones.

"But," he suddenly and fiercely broke out, "the artist could not portray the false heart beneath that white bosom, nor the devil behind that angel face—ha! he comes, the grandee of Spain, who gave up his home beyond the seas to come here and dwell among free Americans," and he turned to the door, a sinister smile resting upon his hideous mouth.

"Ah, Don Henrico, I greet you after many long years," he said, quietly, as the host entered the room, pale, yet unmoved in appearance.

"Yes, it is a surprise I neither expected nor wished," was Don Henrico's calm reply.

"You seem unmoved by my presence. I had expected to see your face whiten, your limbs tremble, when you saw me."

"No, for I knew whom I was to see."

"Ah! and how, pray?"

"My servant described you, and I knew that earth held but one such."

The severe shot at the man's deformity went straight home, for the hideous face grew black with passion, while he said in deep, hoarse tones:

"Henrico, had I held in my heart for you one atom of mercy that might have caused me to spare you, your words have banished it, and as Lazarus saw Dives in hell, so could I see you there without one pang of pity."

Don Henrico seemed to regret the passion he had aroused, for he said quickly:

"I meant not to offend, Ivan, though God knows I would have no mercy from you, were I to tell you that you were an angel in face, and an Apollo in form."

"Why should you expect mercy from me, Henrico?"

"I expect none, and I feel now that you will prove yourself the devil you appear," was the calm rejoinder.

"And why should I not? I bargained with you twenty years ago, offering inducements which you accepted, and in return for vast wealth, a proud name, and a beautiful bride, I received from you vows, which you were to keep when I demanded payment, eighteen years after date. Those vows you gave, believing that their demand for payment would never come, for you mentally swore that I should never live to see them kept; and, Don Henrico, it is not *your* fault that I now stand before you, for well I know the plots you have arranged, and the gold you have given, to have me die by an assassin's hand. But your hirelings were thwarted, and I have come to see that your vows are kept. Are you prepared to keep them?"

"Oh God, have mercy!" and Don Henrico tottered to a seat and buried his face in his hands, while his whole form trembled with the emotion he could not control.

And, gazing down upon him, a bright glitter of triumph in his dark eyes, stood the Hunchback, un pitying and unmerciful, for, after twenty long years, his day of retribution had come.

CHAPTER X.

DON HENRICO'S TREBLE VOW.

FOR a few moments Ivan the Hunchback, as he had been known in the past, stood gazing at the man whom his presence had so disturbed, and the triumphant smile upon his lips turned into a sneer, as, at last, he said in his low, melodious tones:

"Well, Don Henrico, my presence has shaken even your proud, ambitious and callous heart."

"Death would not have more terror for me," broke from the lips of the Don, as he once more conquered his emotion and sprang to his feet with flashing eyes.

"I believe you, Henrico, for you fear death less than the loss of the wealth that makes life worth the living; you were always a luxurious fellow, and your tastes were the same as the luxurious father you so despise for being the author of your being—"

"Hold! Ivan, for the love of Heaven throw not that curse again in my teeth," cried Don Henrico, warmly.

"I must, for though the truth may be unpleasant to your ears now and then, it has been a tingling curse in mine since, a wee child, my own mother turned from me in abhorrence."

"You are elegant in form, handsome in face, and can win men to you as easily as you can fascinate women, while all turn from me with dread and aversion; and yet, my dear Henrico, are we not the same blood?"

"Alas, too true."

"Why should you bemoan that fact, my brother, for where you are godlike in form, I am a devil in deformity."

"But the difference! oh! the difference, Ivan!" groaned Don Henrico.

"Ha! ha! you mean, that in spite of this hideous face and deformed stature of mine, which my own mother shrunk from, and my father cursed at sight, I am not basely born,

while you are! But, brother mine, you should have been the rightful heir, and I the offshoot, for your face and form were worthy the proud name our father bore. It chanced otherwise, and when you robbed me of the one being I loved in the world, I offered you terms—not that I loved you, but from very hate and exquisite fondness for revenge, and, biting at my bait, you were caught, and now I have you just where I want you."

"And you will use the power you hold over me?"

"Ha! ha! Not gather the harvest I have sown? that would be strange!"

"Have you no pity—no mercy to one of your own blood?"

"One of my own blood indeed!" and the Hunchback spoke with deep scorn. "Let me see:—your mother was a mountain bandit's daughter. Her father held our parent prisoner, awaiting rich ransom, but his captive requited his hospitality by mating with his child, and you, brother Henrico, come of that illegal misalliance. But at length returning to his grand old home, our father found his young bride had given birth to a son, *myself*, and oh! such a son, such a deformed, hideous infant was I, that my parents shrunk away; and seeing this, and knowing the story of the bandit's daughter, the nurse of my mother proposed a scheme to get rid of a horror, and gold, poured out as freely as water, sent me to the mountain hovel and brought you to the palace."

"Was it a wonder, Henrico, that my adopted mother clung to the secret for her child, and that both you and I, as we grew in years, knew all?"

"Well, you, the petted one, got the estates of our grandee Enderos, while I became a young bandit, and at last was captured and sentenced to death; but, through you I saved my life, for we both loved the same woman, the one who looks down upon us from yonder portrait."

"She was my captive, and when I told her of my love she scorned me; ay, when I asked her if she could ever love me, her answer was to turn a mirror toward me."

"It revealed all my deformity, and her heartlessness; but I gave her up to you, and you gave me my liberty—but upon conditions."

"Alas, Ivan, I know them but too well."

"Still let me recall them, brother mine, for I came hither so to do."

"You loved to idolatry, Alita, the woman of my love; you loved equally as well your gold, and the proud name you bore, both of which you had robbed me of, and for my revenge, in my own good time, I swore I would give up the fair captive if you would make a treble vow."

"For the love of God, name them not," groaned the wretched Don Henrico.

"For the love of revenge, I shall name them."

"First, you vowed, if I would yield up the *Señorita Alita*, to you, as pure as when she fell into my power, you would, in eighteen years from that date, give into my possession the offspring of your union with the beautiful Spaniard."

"Second, you vowed by the Holy of Holies, that, if I claimed not such offspring named, you would, after eighteen years, give me back all right, title, name and estates, which in infancy I was robbed of on account of my deformity."

"Third, you vowed by all that was sacred in heaven and earth, that if I claimed not the offspring of your union with Alita, nor my title and estates held by you, and kept the secret of your birth and mine, you would give me your life."

"The eighteen years have passed, and more, brother Henrico, and I have come to hold you to the keeping of one of those three vows: which do you think I will claim—your beautiful daughter Edna, who is your only child, your wealth and name, or your life?"

The Hunchback gazed un pityingly upon the man before him, who in turn stared at him, his form like marble, his face rigid, and his whole hope, agony, existence, gleaming from his eyes.

For some moments neither spoke, and neither gaze shrunk from the other's; then Ivan the Hunchback spoke again:

"You were a spoilt and petted child, and sunshine only was in your life, while I, ah! what was not my life in infancy, and what has it not been in later years?"

"My title, my proud name, my wealth, my loved one, with the joys and pleasures that should have been mine, you have had, while I have been a mountain bandit, an outlaw, a hideous deformity, a wanderer from land to land, from sea to sea, and hunted everywhere by the hirelings of the man for whom I gave up all—hunted down to be put to death, that he might live secure in his false name and wealth."

"But I would not die; Death shunned me, that in the end I might possess one joy; that joy will be my revenge on you, Don Henrico, and I know you will not take out of my stricken heart the one ray of sunshine it has known."

"Ah, no, you will not be thus cruel, and hence I have sought you now to ask you which and of the treble vows you will keep."

"Shall it be your daughter, your secret and mine that gives me back my wealth and estates, or your life?"

"Great God! I cannot tell," broke from the lips of the man.

"Ha! ha! ha!" came unfeelingly from the lips of the Hunchback, and then, after his contemptuous laughter, he said:

"You cannot tell; then let me decide for you. Shall I?"

"If it must be, tell me your choice," groaned Don Henrico.

"Well, you love your life most, your wealth next, and your daughter next, and yet you idolize her, so what must be your affection for riches and existence?"

"To take your life would be good revenge for me, and it would be a pleasure to deprive you of your riches; but to leave you both and take your daughter would be a greater joy, for I would be happy in having you sorrow for her, and in having her suffer with dread of an unknown fate."

"And what fate would you have for her, devil that you are?" cried Don Henrico.

"You have heard of Belmont, the Buccaneer?"

"Yes."

"I would give thy daughter to him; in fact, make her a corsair's bride."

"Fiend! Demon! by the God above, I'll have thy foul life, and thus rid myself and the world of a wretch so vile," and Don Henrico sprung forward and clutched at the throat of the Hunchback.

But he was seized in a grasp that caused him to groan with pain, and hurled back upon the divan from which he had sprung, half-stunned and breathless while Ivan the Hunchback said, derisively:

"Fool, try not thy strength with mine, or it will be thy life, and not thy wealth nor thy daughter, I will take."

Cowed by the exhibition of strength he had witnessed, Don Henrico remained silent, and once more the deformed spoke:

"Belmont, the Buccaneer, is a man I admire, for the seas are his abiding-place, the waves and winds his delight, his crew his slaves, and he laughs to scorn the navies of the world."

"Men call him handsome, and his courage none dare dispute, while 'tis said he admires a fair face and form more than most men."

"Though I have not seen him in all my cruises, I now wish to meet him, for he holds captive one I love—strange as it may seem in me to love. That one he will yield up, not for ransom, it is said, but for a maiden of beauty surpassing that of his captive, and the only one I have ever seen that could boast of greater loveliness is your daughter, Don Henrico."

"Thus it is, that I claim the keeping of one of your three vows, and I ask you which shall it be?"

One look at Don Henrico would have softened a heart of stone, one would believe; yet, Ivan the Hunchback showed nothing but joy in his face for the misery he witnessed in the man, in whose veins flowed the same blood as in his own.

"Which vow will you keep, Don Henrico?" he demanded, in his softest tones.

"Oh, God, if one vow must be kept, take her, my Edna, my poor, poor child, for, in shame and sorrow I confess it, I love my riches—my life far more."

With a cry of anguish upon his lips, and wrung from his heart, Don Henrico sunk back upon the divan, unconscious, and in deep, stern tones, Ivan the Hunchback breathed one word:

"Coward!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE HUNCHBACK AND THE PADRE.

THE swooning cry of Don Henrico rung through the mansion, and reaching the ears of Edna, who was seated in the library, quickly brought her to her father's side.

Seeing Don Henrico prostrate upon the divan, and the Hunchback bending over him, she turned with flashing eyes upon the latter, while she said, sternly:

"What means this outrage, sir?"

"There is no outrage, sweet girl; your father has heard news that has overcome him, for, as you see, he has swooned," responded Ivan the Hunchback in tones so soft as to cause Edna to turn a second look upon him, when she met his glorious eyes, now filled with assumed compassion and anxiety that thoroughly deceived her, and so fascinated her, that she failed to observe his hideous features and terrible deformity, for she said, kindly:

"Forgive me, sir; alarm for my father made me hasty in my judgment."

"I am used to the deepest wounds from the sweetest lips," he said, bitterly, and taking from his pocket a small vial, he placed it so that the unconscious man could inhale it.

The result seemed magical, for Don Henrico breathed a long sigh, his form trembled; then his eyes opened and became fixed upon the face of the Hunchback.

"I am glad you are better, Don Henrico; rouse yourself, for your swooning has greatly alarmed your sweet daughter, here," said Ivan, warningly.

"Have you told her?" gasped the Don, with a shudder.

"Simply that you had heard news of a most

painful character, and its unexpectedness unnerved you," and, turning to Edna, he continued:

"A glass of brandy, my dear girl, will fully revive him."

"I will bring it at once. Oh, father, I am happy to see you like yourself, once more," and Edna hastened from the room, while the Hunchback sternly addressed the Don:

"Fool! where is your nerve that you yield to a shock like a woman? Calm yourself, and tell her news from Spain has unmanned you—Ah, she is here."

"And you will not tell her that—"

"I will tell her nothing. Ah, my sweet lady, this draught will make a new man of your father. Here, Don Henrico, take this brandy, for it will give you strength."

The Don took the glass with trembling hands, but, bringing his will to his aid, once more conquered his emotion, dashed off the liquor, and, with an effort, rose to his feet, saying, calmly:

"I am better, now, and in a few days will be able to attend to the business between us, Don Ivan."

"We will say, then, one week from to-day, señor; now, I will say *adios*," and Ivan the Hunchback bowed low to Edna, glanced warningly at Don Henrico, and left the room and the mansion.

He had seen the evil glitter in the eyes of his half-brother: "He means to play me false, but he is a fool to think he can outwit me. *Maldita!* he is an idiot," and, so thinking, he folded his cloak around him closely, bent his slouched hat over his eyes, to keep out the pelting rain, and wended his way along at a rapid pace in the direction of the lower part of the city.

A walk of fifteen minutes brought him to the last city light, a lamp swinging across the street on a chain; beyond all was gloom and darkness, yet indistinctly visible arose the massive walls of an old convent, crumbling to ruin.

Crossing the deserted, grass-grown court of the old cloister, he paused at a stone portal, opening into the stuccoed wall, with its heavy cornices and massive pilasters rising high above his head.

Once through the arched entrance, and he came to a wide stone stairway, but, as though acquainted with the surroundings, he ascended unhesitatingly until he reached a vestibule above, and there the flickering glimmer of a lamp beyond dimly lighted his way.

The winds howled mournfully through the old ruin; the place was cheerless in the extreme; yet it seemed to hold no dread for the Hunchback, for, unmindful of his desolate surroundings, he strode fearlessly on, passed a lamp shedding forth a sickly glare, and then paused at a heavy oaken door, studded with nails and crossed by iron bars.

Upon this door he rapped twice sharply, and then gave three lighter knocks, and almost instantly the door was opened.

"*Felices noches, señor padre!*" accosted the Hunchback, as there appeared in the doorway a tall, heavily-built man, attired in a long black gown, girdled around the waist with a rope, to the ends of which were attached a solid gold crucifix and a rosary.

"Enter," answered the man, opening the door wide. The hunchback stepped over the threshold and the door was closed behind him.

Ivan found himself in a large room, with bare walls, stone flooring, and a table, upon which were piled numerous books, a carved chair, a stool, and a cot for furniture.

A monk's street cap, a penitential whip, composed of seven knotted cords, and a missal, much worn, lay upon the cot, while a metal lamp and iron-rimmed spectacles, with ink-horn and quill pens were upon the table.

And the occupant of the lonely cell was one not to soon forget, for he was past fifty, with iron-gray hair, smoothly-shaven face, that displayed every mobile feature, and severe, dark gray eyes that were most penetrating and severe, while his thin lips expressed a proud and avaricious nature, for a covert, lurking smile dwelt upon his mouth that was dangerous and treacherous.

Yet his face denoted great intelligence, and there was character enough upon every feature to promise strength and indomitable will in whatever he might undertake, be it for good or evil.

"It is a stormy night without, señor," he said, calmly, to Ivan, at the same time motioning him to a seat upon the stool.

"Is it, señor padre? but, in fact, I had not noticed it," was the indifferent reply.

"Your mind is then more stormy within than the elements without?"

"You are right, padre, and I sought you to ask your advice, for I told you, when Jacot, the creole, brought me here, that I would need your services."

"And I need gold," was the calm and suggestive answer.

"You shall have it, for I ask not even a man of your sacred calling to serve me for love, padre. Now tell me, when does this Belmont, the Buccaneer, come to the city?"

"The gold, señor."

"Ah, excuse me! Here! take this purse, and

in it are a dozen *onzas*, that may serve to oil thy holy tongue, for it seems strangely stiff in answering questions."

The monk took the purse without a word, thrust it in an inner pocket of his black gown, and said, calmly:

"The Chevalier Corsair will arrive in the city within the week. I cannot give you the day, as, on account of the coming war with Great Britain, English cruisers are watching the Passes, and American vessels-of-war are in the Lakes."

"And he does not fear to trust himself within the city, where he must certainly be known to many?"

"Ah, no; the word fear is not in the vocabulary of the Chevalier Corsair. You would see him, then?"

"Yes."

"And your business with him?"

"That I will make known only to him," returned the Hunchback, decisively.

"You must make it known to me."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then you cannot see him."

"This is strange, indeed; I can gain an interview with a pirate chief only through a padre, and before doing so must confess all my plans to this Knight of the Crucifix," said the Hunchback, sneeringly.

"It is the only way you can see the Chevalier Corsair when on shore. If you desire to see him otherwise, seek him upon the high seas," was the indifferent reply of the monk.

"And if I confess to you, you will not betray me?"

"The confessional is sacred, be the act confessed what it may," was the stern rejoinder.

"So be it. Belmont, the Buccaneer, or, as you are pleased to call him, the Chevalier Corsair, holds a captive whom I seek, and one whom I love more than the world, life, the future, and one to whom I had intended to devote my existence; but she, for it is a woman, fell into the hands of this noted pirate chief when coming to me from another land, and I have sought her day and night and now know that she is in his power."

"She is safe, for the Chevalier never yet wronged a woman."

"Safe she may be, but I want her in my possession once more, and I need your aid."

"A ransom shall be demanded for the captive."

"A ransom shall be paid; but I am poor, for my all I have invested in the vessel in which I came to this city, searching for the one of whom I speak; but there is one, more beautiful even than the one I speak of, whom I will give into the power of this pirate chief for the one he now holds captive, and her father will pay an enormous ransom for her, and this I wish you to make known to Belmont, the Buccaneer."

"And this maiden whom you would use to get back the one you love?"

"That secret I will not make known; but I promise you, padre, that she is the most beautiful being I ever gazed upon, and her father has untold wealth."

"And you will give her into the power of the Chevalier if he will release the one you crave?"

"I will; so make it known to your friend, the pirate."

"Bring the maiden here, to this cloister, one week from this night, and you shall meet the Chevalier Corsair."

"I half believe you are the buccaneer himself."

The monk smiled as he answered:

"No; I am not half so good a man. But remember—one week from this night."

"I shall not forget, for more than my life depends upon it. *Adios, padre*, and the gold you so love you shall freely have, if you serve me in this."

Ivan the Hunchback turned and left the cell, and once more faced the bitter storm without.

CHAPTER XII.

A FALSE CONFESSION.

EVEN though the presence of Don Ivan was most hateful to him, and had completely unnerved him, Don Henrico Enderos preferred it to being left alone with his daughter, for he felt that some explanation must be made to her of the strange power over him by the Hunchback.

Willing to give up his native land, to live in peace and luxury, he had left Spain and found a home in the new world, where his wealth, refinement and rank gave him a prominent position; but, just as the fear that his treble vow would one day be brought face to face with him had died away, and all dread of the future had gone, the man to whom he had thus pledged himself, and to whom he owed his riches and position, ay, even his name, appeared to dash his hopes in the dust, and bring misery, perhaps ruin, upon him; at least sorrow extreme, should he take his daughter, for the wretched man dearly loved her.

For some moments the Hunchback had been gone, and both Don Henrico and Edna remained in silence, listening to the howling of the storm without, and in spite of his effort at self-control he was deeply moved.

"Edna, my child," he said, in a low tone, "the man who has just left I have a secret to tell you of that nearly interests all of our name."

He paused, for having determined to tell a falsehood, he wished to make it impressive.

"A vendetta has existed between his name and mine, for he comes of one of the oldest families in Spain, and a pledge lies upon me which I must keep, one that will either bring me to ruin financially, cause me to lose my life, or give up all I hold dear on earth."

"Oh, father, let all go, only let your life be spared," cried the noble girl.

"All, all? You know not what you say, Edna, for the other condition, besides wealth and life, is—*you*, my daughter."

"Me? Oh, father, what can you, what do you mean?"

"I mean, my child, that my vows were to give up my riches, my life, or my offspring."

"And who claims this sacrifice?" demanded the girl.

"The Hunchback."

"By what right?"

"That of having the power; but, Edna, do not ask me more, for I have decided."

"Decided, and how, father?"

"He shall have my life."

"Never!"

"I say yes, for then my riches are left for you, my child."

"Never! if there is a sacrifice to be made, let the wealth go, for with life, we both have health, and I have no fear of the future with strong hands and willing hearts; we have had our day of luxury, let us now put up bravely with the poverty side of existence, and we will be content, father, so listen to me, and yield up the money."

"No, Edna, no!"

"No! Why do you so cling to riches, father, that you would rather lose life than be poor?"

"I care not, Edna, for life; it is for you."

"Nonsense! What care I for riches, if I have you left, father? I know not why this man holds this treble claim against you. You tell me it is just, and so I must believe, and I willingly yield up fortune, to save you."

"No, no; the riches must not go," groaned the sordid man.

"Then there is but one alternative: your life must be saved; your money you will not yield; so let him take the third claim, *your offspring*, for I hold *myself* as a sacrifice for you and your gold, father."

He shrunk from the look of scorn in her magnificent eyes, but said, quickly:

"No, no, child, for what might be your fate?"

"Death! for after I had fulfilled the conditions of the accursed pledge that binds you to that deformed creature, I would, with my own hand, take my life."

She looked grandly beautiful as she spoke, and, gazing upon her, the selfish man determined to save her at all events, though his coward heart had admitted that to save his money and his life, she must be sacrificed.

"Edna, there may be no reason for any sacrifice, for there are ready hands here in New Orleans that gold will buy."

"What mean you, sir?"

"I mean that gold may buy our release from this man."

"A good idea, if he will compromise for half our wealth."

"You do not yet comprehend; he would not compromise on ten times the wealth I could offer him; but there are others that gold would buy to rid us of this monster."

"Ha! no wonder I was dull of comprehension when my own father proposes to become an indirect assassin! Oh, father, father!" and the young girl sunk upon a divan and buried her face in her hands, while her whole form was convulsed with emotion.

Alarmed at the storm he had raised in her bosom, the wily man determined to recede, and said, quickly:

"You are right, Edna; it was but a moment of weakness on my part, when I felt that his life alone lay between me and the breaking of the vows made to him. Look up, my child, and let us dismiss the painful matter. I will see him, and let our riches go; it is best to have it thus."

"My dear, noble father! You are yourself once more, and if our gold does go from us, you will never regret that I was not sacrificed, or that your life was not forfeited."

He kissed her fondly, and then retired to his room, his heart black with designs against his beautiful child, whom, as dearly as he loved, must be given up rather than his life and gold, for the gold gone all was lost that was most dear to him, but the daughter, though wedded to a corsair, might be restored and saved to him, in the end.

CHAPTER XIII.

CORSAIR AND HUNCHBACK.

IN a large and comfortable room, in a *cabaret* on the Rue Bienville, a few days after the interview between the padre and the Hunchback, the latter personage sat one evening, a cigar

between his teeth, a cup of French coffee upon the table at his side, and a letter open in his hand.

Glancing at it he read aloud for the twentieth time:

"The Chevalier will honor the Hunchback by coming upon him at his *cabaret* at seven this evening."
"PADRE BONITO."

"Curses upon that priest! He knew my name, and yet calls me *the Hunchback*! Oh, God! how great the crime in this world to be deformed, to be marked by any bodily infirmity that makes one hideous, and his presence an aversion!"

"Once my heart and soul were pure; but soon I learned that I was loathed, and so bitter was I at the thought that I gave up my pure birthright, that a man born in God's image, and not as I, in Satan's, should wear it, while I placed dishonor upon my own brow."

"Yet, hideous as I am, that one being whom I saved from a fate more terrible than death to a pure woman, loved me, and though the grave claimed her from me, she left our child, our beautiful Stella, who loves me, for, away back behind my deformity she sees what might have been my nature had I not been accursed."

"Oh, Stella! Stella! what fate is yours, my poor, poor child! Alone among a horde of pirates, for little aid will that accursed kinsman of your mother's, Don Hernandez, be to you, for he is as treacherous as a snake."

"The wealth all might go if I could only get you back, my child, my darling!"

He leaned his huge head upon his hands and shook with emotion for a moment; but, springing to his feet with flashing eyes, he cried aloud:

"But if harm has befallen you, my beautiful—if insult has been offered, or dishonor has been forced, woe to every man who had hand in your capture! With my own true right hand will I drive my dagger to their black hearts!"

He strode rapidly across the room for several times, and then sat down once more and picked up the letter, saying in his usual voice, now wholly free from excitement:

"The Chevalier will meet me *here*, in my *cabaret*! A bold man, indeed, to trust himself in my power, for I could have him seized and wring from him a confession of what he had done with my child. But he must give her up, cost what it may."

"My gold he has, and may keep, but not my child. Oh, no, and her ransom shall be Edna Enderos, as my noble brother calls himself now. Ha! ha! ha! how sweet the revenge I will reap after these long years of waiting—ha! there is a knock. *Enter!*"

The door swung open, and a *garçon* ushered into the room a tall cloaked form, saying, in a loud tone:

"Monsieur De Lisle, to see the Señor Don Ivan."

The door opened, and the Hunchback turned to meet his visitor, starting almost with surprise, as he beheld before him a man of commanding presence, with a face strangely fascinating and youthful, for one who had upon his brow the brand of corsair.

"Am I mistaken? or do I welcome the Chevalier Corsair?" asked the Hunchback, advancing.

"Men so call me, señor; but, the Padre Bonito tells me you would see me on a matter of importance," was the quiet response, as the pirate chief took the chair Don Ivan placed for him.

"Yes, a matter of great importance indeed, Señor Chevalier; but you are a brave man to intrust yourself here, when I could so easily command your arrest, and the arrest of Monsieur De Lisle, Belmont, the Buccaneer, or the Chevalier Corsair, as he may please to call himself, would mean death."

The chief smiled, but no muscle indicated by a tremor that he feared such a fate, and he answered lightly:

"In the midst of life, señor, we are in death, and the Dark Angel has so long stalked by my side that I do not dread his summons; but, were I brought to bay, you would find I would fight for life, if only for the excitement of the combat. Now tell me how I can serve you?"

"I will; but, first answer me—have I ever wronged you in any way?"

"Señor, I believe in you I behold Don Ivan Enderos?"

"Could you doubt it, once having seen or heard of me?" asked the Hunchback, with intense bitterness.

"I meant not offense, señor. If God has cursed you, no mortal tongue should ridicule His act. I simply asked if I addressed the Señor Don Ivan Enderos," said the Chevalier, impressively.

"Yes; and I asked in what I had ever wronged you?"

"Personally, you have never wronged me; but a boat from my vessel one night was unable to reach us from the land; the storm blew them upon your shores, and through your act they were put to death—nay, bear me; as outlaws they sailed the seas with their lives in their hands, and under the black flag they were entitled to die; but starved, wretched, wearied

and ill they were cast, as wrecked seamen, upon your mercy, and cruelly you had them put to death, and I have felt revengeful toward you ever since."

"They were your men, and they had broken the laws of land and sea; but, what had I done that you should rob me of my innocent child, my beautiful daughter, and my gold?"

"Hold! did not your daughter tell you why she came on board of my vessel, señor?"

"Tell me? No! I have not seen her, and—"

"Have not seen her? Why, when did you leave your home?"

"The day after your landing and carrying her off, with all my wealth, the accumulation of years."

"Señor Ivan, your daughter was landed at a seaport, and your gold, too, not ten leagues from your house."

"Oh, God, I thank Thee."

"Listen! As you will have me tell you all, I may as well make known to you that I consented, as a revenge against you, to land and pillage your gold chests, but I dare not be treacherous even to him who laid the plot and tell you his name; let your daughter do that."

"I knew not that you had a child, or I should not have consented; but I saw her that night, and when she made known who she was, I ordered the gold restored, and it should have been then, had not the dragoons come upon us from the fort."

"Stopping, with some of my men, to beat them back, I reached my vessel to find on board your daughter and your gold."

"Life is sweet, señor, and I did not delay then to put the Señorita Stella ashore, for already had the cruisers along the coast been signaled to give chase; but I landed the next morning near a seaport, and sent your daughter and your fortune ashore, as she will tell you."

"But, how came she aboard your vessel, Señor Chevalier?"

"That she will tell you; but I pledge you by no act or order of mine."

"And was the one who laid this plot against me the one who determined to carry her off?"

"Yes, señor; but more I cannot tell you."

The Hunchback arose, evidently deeply moved by what he had heard, and paced several times across the room, the Chevalier Corsair eying him closely.

At length he approached and held out his hand.

"Señor, your words I believe, for you have no false look in your eyes. I returned to my home, from Havana, to find it sacked, and my darling child gone, and the commandante of the fort told me that the Chevalier Corsair had done the work, carrying off my daughter, her maid, my gold, and my kinsman, Don Manuel Hernandez, who would have defended my home."

"I knew that vessels were sent in hot pursuit, and I waited for several days to get tidings of the capture of your vessel; but alas, they returned, and all I could learn was that your fleet vessel had run from them like the wind. A coaster reported that a combat seemed waging on your decks as you flew along."

"Yes, my men mutinied, because I gave up your gold with your daughter; but I quelled that trouble, and, as I tell you, put into the port ten leagues from your hacienda, and landed Señorita Enderos, her cousin, her maid, and your treasure."

"Señor, you indeed deserve the name you have won of Chevalier, even though it is linked with that of corsair, and it was knowing of many of your noble deeds that I hoped the best for my poor child; but I sought you out, and came, in a small lugger to this port, where I was told I could find your haunts, or meet you, perhaps, that I might beg you for my beautiful idol, telling you to keep my gold, but return her to me."

"Ay, and for her I intended to give you as ransom one equally as beautiful in face and form, and in knowing that you brought dishonor upon her, it would be joy to my heart."

"Hold! would you show that your heart is as deformed as your body, that you would revel in the wretchedness of an innocent girl?"

The Hunchback sprang to his feet at the ringing words of the corsair, and his face became livid as he said, in husky tones:

"The same feeling—revenge—that prompted you to rob me of my gold, in retaliation for the hanging of your men, causes me to wish ruin upon the one of whom I speak."

"Don Ivan, I pitied you for your misfortunes in being stamped as one accursed of God: I admired you for your devoted love for your daughter; but I abhor you for your cowardice."

"Cowardice! Dare you call me a coward?" and the Hunchback's voice rung threateningly, while he glanced toward a handsomely-mounted sword that lay on the table.

"Ay, the man who would wish to drag a pure woman down to ruin, to gratify a revenge, is a vile coward."

"Oh, God, do you repeat it! Then shall you answer with your life," and the Hunchback sprang for the sword, and seizing it, came toward the corsair, who had calmly risen, and

dropped his hand upon the hilt of a dagger he carried in his bosom.

"Señor, if you have cause of quarrel with me, we can select a more fitting time and place," warned the Chevalier, calmly.

"No, the word coward to me shall never grow cold on your tongue; ay, and I'll rid the seas of the Chevalier Corsair and avenge the insult."

The Hunchback was a skilled swordsman, and, conscious of his own strength, he began the attack; but his blade was shivered to atoms when it struck the uplifted weapon of the corsair, while he was seized in a grasp of steel and hurled into the corner of the room as if he had been a toy.

Staggering to his feet, half-stunned, livid with passion, and bleeding, he saw that he was alone; the Chevalier Corsair had departed!

CHAPTER XIV.

DON IVAN'S PLOT.

WHEN Don Ivan Enderos brought his power of self-control into command, he checked his first intention of running after the Chevalier Corsair to denounce him in the street as a pirate and the famous sea rover; he stood a moment in silent thought, and then bathing the cut on his forehead, dressed it, and sat down to meditate.

"Is my heart getting as deformed as my body, that I attempt to slay the man who has given me back my daughter and my gold?" he murmured.

"It would seem so; but coward is a word harsh to my ears—and yet, am I not a coward to visit upon her the sins of her father?"

"But I hate her, too, for 'twas her mother who, when I told her of my love, gave me a mirror, in which to look at myself, while hatred of him I have inherited! Ay, from my mother have I the heritage of hatred for Don Henrico, the basely born Enderos; and I will have my revenge, for if this honorable pirate will not aid me, then some one else shall, for I will drag down into the very filth of the street both father and daughter—Hal! I think I have a tool to serve me, or I mistake the avaricious face of the Padre Bonito; now for an interview with that brother of Satan."

So saying the Hunchback arose and attired himself for the street, throwing around him the heavy cloak he wore, more to hide his hideous deformity than for warmth.

Sauntering out of the *cabaret* he met Pierre Jacot, the landlord, who said, politely:

"The señor saw his visitor?"

"Yes; do you know who he is?"

"A very une gentleman, indeed—the Monsieur De Lisle."

"And, what else?"

"If the señor does not know his guest, it is not for me to do so," replied the cautious Jacot. Don Ivan passed out into the street, and after a rapid walk approached the old convent in which the Padre Bonito had his home.

Finding his way to the cell, or chamber, at one end of the rock-bound corridor, he gave a loud knock. The padre quickly appeared, and recognizing him, said, simply:

"Enter, my son."

"Your son! You would curse me, padre, were I really thy offspring. I am deformed and accursed, I know, and hence I fling down the gauntlet of hatred against the race of whom I am but a foul blot."

"Benedicite, hijo mio," answered the padre, solemnly, rising and holding his hands above his head.

"Oh, curses upon your blessings, padre! I came not here for nonsense but to ask your aid."

"You have seen the Chevalier, then?"

"Yes, and he left me his mark, and the taunt of coward ringing in my ears."

"You should have known better than to have angered him."

"Señor padre, I choose not my words to any man. But enough—he did me a favor such as I can never repay him for, but when I sought his aid in a matter of revenge he was insulted that I should believe him so base—called me a coward, which I resented, but he shivered my sword and hurled me across the room with a strength I knew not man could possess, and I am no child, padre."

"Though a corsair the Chevalier has honor."

"How unlike you and I! But, to the point—I need your aid."

"Would you ask a padre to serve you in that which a pirate had refused to act?" demanded the priest, sternly.

"Oh, yes, for you wear but a mask of piety, which removed, shows Satan in the robe of the saint."

"You are bold, señor, and I have a mind to fling you from that window," and the padre arose.

"Only one man could do that, and I've had one lesson to-night; but, sit down and hear me, for I have gold now to offer, as I can get an Havana banker to advance me money, now that your courtly corsair has returned me my fortune."

"Well, señor, what would you?" and drop-

ping all sign of anger the Padre Bonito resumed his seat.

"I seek revenge. There is but one way I can reach my foe so well as through his love for his child, and, Spaniard though he is, he is no Catholic, and dreads your church as Satan does holy water."

"It was my intention to give the daughter of my foe in ransom for my own child; but she being safe I offered the maiden to the corsair, with the result you know. Now I ask you to take her and place her forever behind the walls of a convent."

"That were hard to do here, señor, if, as I suspect, she is rich and prominent."

"Then elsewhere?"

"Elsewhere, yes."

"Where?"

"In Havana, for instance. You came here in a swift-sailing *caravel*."

"How know you that, padre?"

"I know many things, señor," was the significant reply.

"Admitted; I came here in a small but swift *caravel*, from my island home in the West Indies, and she is still here: what then?"

"I will give you a letter to a person in Havana, who will place the maiden in a convent there; but you must take her to Cuba yourself."

"I can do so, I think, on my way back to my own home; but how to get her in my power is the trouble."

"That is easy, for the Carnival time has come, and you can go boldly to her home, gag her, mask her face, and bear her to your vessel, and it will be looked upon as a masquerading freak, especially as you are—"

"Go on, padre! Don't spare me, but say that my own hideous form will be looked upon as a *mock* deformity; but I will take your advice, so tell me your fee and I will give you the gold to-morrow."

"Place in my hand fifty *onzas*, and I will go with you, and carry the maiden safely on board your *caravel*."

"It is a bargain! I will be here with the gold; then we will arrange the hour for our work, and the vessel shall be all ready to sail. Most pious padre, *adios!*" and with a mock reverential bow the Hunchback left the cell and the ruined convent, rubbing his hands with sinister joy, while he muttered:

"Hal! hal! hal! all the venom of revenge is coming back against my noble brother, Don Henrico, and when I have his sweet daughter incarcerated in the walls of a convent, I will torture his life into a very hell on earth. Oh! but revenge is a sweet morsel that melts like nectar on my lips!"

He walked rapidly along, unaware that a tall, cloaked form had crept out from the shadow of the old ruin and was following him with swift, silent tread, and that a long, keen knife was held in a hand that grasped it with deadly intent.

A moment more and the tracker was upon him; the gleaming blade descended with terrific force upon the deformed shoulders, only to strike with a ringing, metallic sound, and break short off at the hilt!

The blow staggered the Hunchback for an instant, but only for an instant, for, with a cry of rage, he turned and grasped his intended assassin in his long and powerful arms, while he cried:

"That is your game, is it?"

The man struggled, but the slouch hat and cloak were torn from him, and the light of a swinging lamp, across the street above, revealed the dark, passion-marred face of Don Henrico Enderos, while, in sneering tones, the Hunchback said:

"My noble brother, I thank you!"

CHAPTER XV.

ENTRAPPED.

FOILED in his dastard attempt upon the life of his half-brother, Don Henrico Enderos stood silent, dejected, and overwhelmed with anger and mortification, for he knew that he was but as a child in the arms of the one he would have slain.

With sneering, sinister smile the Hunchback gazed upon him, and then said slowly:

"I have done thee rare service, brother mine, in preventing the brand of Cain from being set on thy brow, for, not trusting in hirelings longer, you thought to do your own deadly work well and sure, and thus save gold and misery for thyself."

"But the dagger point has sought my hideous form so often, I have seen fit to wear a steel shirt, and this is not the first time it has turned aside your blows, though the one just struck was the first with your own hand."

"You are gaining courage, Don Henrico, with years; but let us not quarrel, for I am none the worse for the blow, and I was just intending a visit to your palatial home."

Don Henrico now looked the Hunchback straight in the face, and said moodily:

"Ivan Enderos, the devil takes care of his own, or long ago you would have been dead."

"Admitted, brother mine. But come; let us not quarrel, but walk with me to your home."

"Dare you enter there, plotting my ruin as you are, and after what has just occurred?"

"Oh, yes, Henrico; I dare do anything. Come, I would again see thy sweet daughter, and if she is to be the lamb of sacrifice, and not you, I would plot to get her into my power, that her doting father may not be suspected of yielding her up to save himself and his gold. Come, let us walk," and slipping his hand into the arm of Don Henrico, he led him along, in spite of himself, and soon they reached the elegant mansion, which was brightly lighted, and from the windows of which floated a voice in song.

"My daughter has company," announced Don Henrico, hesitatingly.

"What doth it matter? Present me to thy guests," was the reply, and with a muttered curse Don Henrico gave the brass knocker a rap. Jacques at once appeared in answer, with some surprise depicted upon his face when he beheld who was his master's companion.

In the parlor, at the piano, a rare instrument in those days, sat Edna. She had just finished singing a Spanish ballad, while, by her side, stood a tall, elegant-looking gentleman of thirty, whose dark face and clear-cut features stamped his creole lineage.

Edna's face paled at sight of her father and the guest he brought with him; but she arose and bowed coldly, while Don Henrico introduced the Hunchback as:

"My friend, the Señor Don Ivan Enderos, of the West Indies."

Noel Valverde, the handsome young creole, advanced at once, and with no sign of having observed the hideous deformity of the visitor, offered his hand, and said in an easy, winning way natural to him:

"It gives me pleasure to know Don Ivan."

The Hunchback grasped the proffered hand, and his hideous face flushed, as he answered:

"And I to meet Monsieur Valverde," and he turned to a seat, a strange, soft expression in his eyes, for so often had the start of abhorrence, the look of loathing, and shrink of dread, been turned upon him, that he felt drawn to the man who saw not his deformity, or, if seeing it, gave no sign of so doing.

Uneasy at the presence of a man he wished dead, and unnerved at his failure to take his life, Don Henrico showed his agitation to such a degree that Edna, who now held perfect control over herself, suggested an adjournment to the adjoining room for refreshments.

Then Don Ivan so exerted his powers of entertainment that even the unhappy Don Henrico was charmed with his narratives of scenes and adventures in other lands, while Edna seemed to forget his hideousness in the music of his voice, the fascination of his eyes, and the brilliancy of his conversation. Noel Valverde listened, enraptured, to every word that fell from the lips of the strange man, who suddenly broke the spell by a sinister, bitter laugh, and the remark:

"But one such as I, a caricature on the image of my Maker, should not monopolize the attention of a fair maiden and gallant cavalier. Adios, señorita and señors."

Without another word he arose and turned away, and, though Don Henrico followed him to the door, not a word was spoken between them, for, pulling his cloak around him, he strode forth into the darkness.

But at the corner he turned, and, standing beneath the shadow of a China tree, he muttered:

"Ere long it will be a long good-night for thee, my beauty—a long good-night to the world of pleasure—and then will begin the sweetness of my revenge against thee and thine!"

Even as he uttered the last words a dark object dropped down from the tree upon his shoulders; bony fingers grasped at his throat with death-like grip, while upon the ground sunk the Hunchback.

One glance into the face of his assailant brought a gurgling cry from the lips of even Don Ivan Enderos; and no wonder, for he was in the clutch of a being who, if anything, was more hideously deformed than himself!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DWARF.

WITH the steel grip upon his throat, and his arms pinioned to his sides by the vise-like legs of the person who had sprung upon him, Don Ivan knew that he was wholly at the mercy of this hideous foe.

A head of monstrous size, huge white teeth, deep-set eyes, cunning and devilish, a skin as black as night, a dwarf in height, a giant in body, with short, stout legs, and arms that reached almost to his feet, was what Don Ivan saw in that glance, before his head reeled with the pressure upon his throat, and his eyes became blind with pain.

But then distinctly he heard, as he lay upon the ground in the power of his fearful assailant, the clang of an iron gate, a quick, firm tread, and then a stern voice of command.

"Jocko! Jocko, what means this?"

The clutch at his throat was released, the weight from his body removed, and then, as returning consciousness swept back to him, the

Hunchback heard the reply in thick, humble tones:

"Jocko hear him talkee bad; thinkee want harm to massa and massa friends, so wantee kill him."

"I hope to Heaven you have not done so. He is my friend and the friend of Don Henrico. Bad Jocko, to do this!" and Noel Valverde, for he it was, bent over the prostrate form—the Hunchback still unable to move.

"He lives! Did you use your ugly knife, Jocko?"

"No, massa; me chokee him."

"That is enough; take him up and bring him home."

With perfect ease, and quickly, as though anxious to gain favor again in his master's eyes, the dwarf raised the Hunchback in his arms and followed Noel Valverde for the distance of a square, when they turned into a grand garden through an iron gate which the young creole opened with a key.

Crossing the ornamental grounds they came to a large and elegant mansion standing back from the street, and, knocking at the portal, it was opened by the *conciierge*, an old family servant, clad in livery.

"William, send restoratives at once to my room," ordered Noel Valverde, as the old negro started back at sight of the burden carried by Jocko, and he stood aside to allow them plenty of room to pass. "Into my room, Jocko," and the dwarf ascended a broad, carpeted stairway and turned into a carved door, which led into a suit of sumptuously furnished rooms; then, at a motion of his master, the dwarf laid the Hunchback upon a velvet divan.

"Ah! I am glad to see you recovering," said the creole, bending over Don Ivan, whose blood-shot eyes were now open and fixed upon him.

He tried to speak, but the effort failed, and Jocko handed a glass of wine, which he drank, but with difficulty.

"I regret, señor, this attack upon you exceedingly, and will do all in my power to atone for it; but Jocko, here, in some way believed you my foe, or the enemy of Don Henrico and his daughter, and sprung upon you."

"I muttered words he doubtless misunderstood to refer to you, or them, and if he acted to save you, as he believed, I cannot blame him," answered Don Ivan, though with evident pain.

"It is kind of you to thus excuse him; but the poor fellow is greatly attached to me, for, some years ago, he was an outcast in the streets—no one caring for him, and having no home, for he was deserted by some ship's crew that had brought him from Africa; one day I took his part against the rabble and gave him a home with me. Since then, if I go out at night he dogs my footsteps, and waits like a patient dog my return; so you see I cannot but be fond of him."

"You are a noble man, Monsieur Valverde, and would to God there were more like you! I owe you my life, for your slave would have killed me, and from this day I am your friend, and Jocko's, for his very deformity makes him akin to me, and if you refuse not his friendship, I feel that you will not mine, for, hideous though I be, I am neither a slave, nor a poor man."

"My dear señor, you are too bitter against yourself. The mind, the heart, both of which you possess, command respect far more than beauty of face and of form."

"In your eyes, yes; but not in the world's vision. But I will not tax you longer with my presence, for I am recovered now," and declining the urgent entreaties of Noel Valverde to remain all night, as his guest, the Hunchback turned to go, but started, at beholding before him a young girl, who had just glided into the room, and stood looking at him, yet with no curious stare at his deformity or shrinking from him.

At a glance he saw the resemblance between the maiden and Noel Valverde—she possessing all the beauty of his face and form, toned down into feminine loveliness, and with eyes that were the windows of a pure soul.

"My sister, Manine, Don Ivan Enderos," said Noel, politely, and the beautiful girl stretched forth her hand in welcome. Bending low over it the Hunchback said, in his soft, winning tones:

"And to your brother I owe my life. Adios, monsieur and mademoiselle."

He again moved toward the door, and, a moment after Jocko let him out into the street, saying humbly:

"Massa, forgivee Jocko?"

"Yes, for deformity makes us two akin," and he walked away.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BITER BITTEN.

TRUE to his promise to Don Ivan the Padre Bonito was on hand to aid him in the kidnapping of Edna Enderos, for the fifty *onzas* had been paid, the *caravel** was ready for sailing at a moment's notice, and the two plotters were

* A three-masted schooner with lateen sails, frequently used in the West Indies.

taking advantage of the merry Carnival to carry out their evil design.

The plan of the Hunchback at first worked well, for Don Henrico being away from home, a forged letter from him, begging Edna to accompany the bearer, who was the padre in disguise, and who would bring her to him, had caused her to leave her home, and, once in the waiting carriage, she was seized in the strong arms of Don Ivan, a handkerchief, saturated with a drug to cause unconsciousness, held to her nose, and in an instant almost she appeared as though dead.

But the gay masqueraders in the streets blocked the way, the vehicle was detained on account of the crowded *trottoirs*, and, ever and anon, some fantastic harlequin would spring upon the backs of the horses and remain until lashed away by the angry *garçon*.

In turning into the Rue Bienville they were stopped by an odd procession of Gipsies, troubadours and negroes, and again in front of a *café* a band of fantastic singers were caroling melodies, to the amusement of the lookers on.

"Why do you stop, *garçon*?" cried Don Ivan, angrily, for the dozenth time, addressing the *cabriolette*.

"I cannot go on, monsieur," was the answer.

"Lash them out of the way," came the stern order.

"I dare not, monsieur."

"Messieurs," and Don Ivan stuck his head out of the window; "*messieurs! citoyens!* will you kindly permit my cabriolet to pass, as I am in haste?"

The crowd glanced upon the hideous face, and evidently mistaking it for being *en masque*, or made up, cried out, pleasantly:

"Monsieur is one of us; let him pass."

"*Je suis infiniment obligé, messieurs,*" said Don Ivan, in perfect French; but in Spanish came a deep oath at those who had believed his face not human.

But, though the cabriolet rolled on once more for awhile, the mad spirit of the Carnival was abroad too thoroughly to allow it to proceed wholly unmolested, and, at length, the driver was forced to a stand-still once more.

"Curses on this crowd! she will revive soon, and the padre and I have no more of the drug with me," growled the Hunchback, anxiously.

"Then, let us get out and walk. Here, place these masks on her and yourself, and I will carry her, while you make way with those strong arms of yours."

"But, the people?"

"Will look upon it as a mad freak of the Carnival. It is our only chance—come!"

He raised Edna in his strong arms, and the two men sprung from the cabriolet and began forcing their way through the crowd, who, indeed, little dreamed that, in the act of carrying a maiden in his arms, the padre was far from perpetrating a mere innocent joke.

But, as they sped rapidly along the influence of the drug wore off, consciousness returned to Edna, and, as the reader will remember, her cries for aid, at first, were believed to be feigned, until, suddenly, there was one person who did not so regard them, and, boldly springing to the rescue, daringly took her under his protection.

Observing that the crowd were in no pleasant humor with them, having discovered that their deed was one of desperate earnestness, the Hunchback and the padre beat a hasty retreat; but, the gay masqueraders were now willing for almost any escapade against the two men, who, in the guise of masqueraders, were committing an act of devilry; so they started in pursuit, hooting and hissing, and getting up their courage to attack and punish the insult to a fair maiden.

"Come, to my boat! and then on board the *caravel*," cried the Hunchback, quickly, as he moved rapidly forward, with the padre, in the direction of the *levee*, where the gig of the vessel, with its four black oarsmen, awaited the coming of Don Ivan.

But, seeing their purpose, the crowd pressed still closer, and it was evident that they were to be rudely treated, so both men turned at bay, seizing their arms.

"I warn you off, messieurs; we will not be bullied with impunity," cried the Hunchback, and he handled his short sword in a way that proved he was not to be intimidated.

"It will be the worse for some of you, if you press us more," warned the padre, in his deep, stern tones.

"Rush on them!" "They are kidnappers!"

"Down with them!" came in angry voices from the crowd, and a score of the boldest masqueraders, rendered more bold by the swords they wore, were forming a line to charge upon the two men, whom they doubted, when one of their number had been struck down, would have torn them almost limb from limb.

"Hold! what means this, *citoyens*?" suddenly cried a ringing voice, and a tall form, closely followed by a short, stout figure, forced his self forward and stood between the angry crowd and the two men at bay, and who stood with their backs against an old *adobe* wall.

"It is Monsieur Noel Valverde!" called out one of the throng, as the handsome, unmasked face of the young millionaire was recognized.

"And his deformed slave, Jocko," said another, when the negro was seen at his master's back.

"Yes, messieurs, I am M. Valverde. I have come to interfere, for I see you are pressing rudely these two men, and I always take the side of the weak," remarked the young man, in a calm, fearless way.

"Bravo! you are always good, M. Noel!"

"He is the friend of the poor man!"

"Long live M. Valverde and his name!"

Such were the shouts that went up from the fickle crowd when they recognized the young creole,* who was, indeed the poor man's friend.

"But he does not know their villainy."

"They are kidnappers!"

"They were flying with a young girl!" came the answering cries, and M. Valverde turned to the Hunchback, and said:

"Monsieur, there is some mistake here, is there not?"

"There is, sir; at the request of Don Enderos I was bearing his daughter to him, and she fainted, and beholding the crowd around cried out in alarm, and I was set upon, with my friend here, and she was taken from me," explained the Hunchback, with ready lie.

"Ah! the Señorita Enderos, you say? I trust no harm has befallen her."

"Oh, no, monsieur; she returned to her home, when myself and companion were pressed by these mulattoes; do you not recognize me as the friend of Don Henrico, not his enemy? I am Don Ivan Enderos."

"Ah! I recall you now," answered M. Valverde, too anxious not to wound the Hunchback by saying that he recognized him at a glance from his carriage, and sprung out to come to his rescue; and turning to the crowd he continued in a loud tone:

"Messieurs, there is some mistake here, for this gentleman is my friend, and he was not bearing the lady off for evil reasons. If I answer for him, you will let him pass, assuredly."

"Oh, yes!"

"Long live M. Valverde!"

"Hunchback, you've saved that ugly face of yours this time," and like cries resounded upon all sides, while, raising his hat to the throng, the young creole led the way toward the levee, Don Ivan telling him that his boat awaited him there.

"Monsieur Valverde, again I owe you lasting regards. Yonder is my *caravel*, and will you honor me by going on board and having a glass of wine with me?" asked the Hunchback, earnestly.

"Yes, I will accept your invitation, Don Ivan, as I observe from here that you have a very beautiful vessel. Jocko, bid my carriage await me here," and while the slave darted away, with a speed none would have believed him capable of with his short legs, the creole, padre, and Don Ivan entered the boat.

But, as it swung off from the shore, with a mighty bound Jocko lighted in the stern, and crouched down behind his master.

"Why, Jocko, your rudeness I must reprove, sir," said Noel Valverde, sternly.

"Me wantee go with massa; me likee Hunchback too," said the negro, in excuse; but it was evident from Don Ivan's face, now unmasked, that the friendly regard Jocko held for him was not reciprocated.

A row of an eighth of a mile brought them to the *caravel*, a three-masted schooner of two hundred tons burden.

She was crouching, rather than lying upon the murky river, and suggested the thought of a long, lean-bodied greyhound about to spring upon its prey.

Her hull was bronze rather than black, and a ribbon of gilt ran from her sharp bows to the stern; the bulwarks were high—so high, in fact, that only the red skull-caps of her negro crew could be seen above them.

Her sides were pierced for five guns to a broadside, yet none were visible on her decks, and only a dozen men, all slaves, could be seen.

Her model was as faultless as a regatta club-boat, and her slender masts, single sticks, raked far aft, and were also bronzed, as were the long slender yards, crossing them obliquely and suspending the huge lateen sails, as white as snow.

"You have a beautiful vessel here, Don Ivan," declared Noel Valverde, as he stepped on deck, followed by the padre, who still remained masked, and yet who glanced around him with the admiring gaze of a man who had been upon dark-blue water in his time, and knew a pretty craft when he saw it.

"Yes, she is my yacht, and cost me a round sum. I have a permit to arm her, for it is dangerous cruising nowadays, M. Valverde, upon an unarmed deck. My guns are in the hold; but important duties called me to your city before I had time to get the Whirlwind in perfect trim."

"An appropriate name, doubtless, Don Ivan, for she looks as though she could fly like a whirl-

wind over the waters. I have frequently thought of having such a vessel built for myself, though it is rather an expensive toy."

"No; as you see, I have manned it with my own slaves; but come into the cabin, please," and the Hunchback led the way, followed by Noel Valverde, but not by the padre.

But, in a moment the Don returned, and called to him a bright young mulatto, and said to him:

"Bear this to the home of Don Henrico Enderos, Rue St. Luis, and return at once, for it needs no answer," and he hastily scribbled on a leaf of his note-book as follows:

"Let Don Henrico remember that he did send for the Señorita Edna, and impress it upon her mind that she is not to make known who was her escort to-day, or it will be the worse for father and daughter."

The young slave took the note, sprung into a light canoe that was alongside and rowed rapidly shoreward, while Don Ivan turned to the padre.

"Come, padre, join us in the cabin."

"It is better that I should not, Don Ivan, for M. Valverde knows my face as well as I do his, and I had better not unmask."

"True; do as you please."

"And take the dwarf with you—M. Valverde's slave, for his eyes are roving over everything."

Calling to Jocko to follow him, Don Ivan re-entered the cabin. A slave placed wines and sweetmeats before himself and guest; but, hardly had they drank one glass of wine, when the Hunchback sprung to his feet, crying out:

"What means this? The *caravel* is in motion."

He rushed to the companionway, but found it closed and bolted, and in roaring tones he shouted:

"Ho on deck! Pedro! Alonzo! Bernado! come here!"

And he called for his slaves in still louder tones, yet no answer came, while on deck were heard heavy feet moving rapidly about, and the vessel, careened on one side, was dashing rapidly along!

What could it mean?

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNMASKED.

As soon as the masked stranger had forced his way through the crowd, with Edna upon his arm, he called a cabriolet, and, assisting her into it, asked where the driver should carry her, and, in doing so, gazed, for the first time, directly into her face, which was now composed, after her alarming adventure.

She saw him start, yet the visor he wore concealed his face thoroughly. Had he met her before? Was he one of her numerous admirers? she wondered.

With perfect politeness, as he had now no further cause to force himself upon her, he intended to leave her, and, seeing this, and with curiosity to know more of her preserver, Edna asked:

"Monsieur, am I not to know more of my kind preserver, or at least to see his face?"

"It were better masked, lady," was the strange reply.

"But you will, if your time will permit, escort me to my home, that my father, who I trust is by this time at home, may thank you for your goodness to his daughter."

"No, lady; I need no thanks."

"But, am I safe yet? See the crowded streets, and I am going to impose upon you to still be my kind escort," persisted Edna, more and more interested in the strange man, and, upon that account, more desirous to find out who and what he was.

"If you command, mademoiselle, I obey. Your address, please," he said, quietly.

She gave it, and, telling the coachman where to drive, he sprang into the cabriolet, which at once rolled away toward the home of Don Henrico Enderos.

"And you will neither tell me your name, nor let me see the face of my brave friend, to whom I owe so much?" said Edna, in a tone of pique, as the cabriolet stopped before her father's elegant home.

"I must repeat, lady, that it is better that you should neither know my name, nor see my face. Would to Heaven it were otherwise, but a cruel Fate renders it best as it is."

She was more than ever impressed by his sad tone, yet would not persist in urging what, it was plainly evident, he did not wish to do; and yet, having bade the coachman to await him, when he escorted her to the door, she said, once more:

"Señor, farewell, for, as you so firmly refuse to give me your name, or a glance at your face, I feel that we shall never meet again."

"True, our paths in life must diverge far apart, though this is the second time we have met," he said, sadly.

"Then you know who I am?"

"Only when you gave me your name and address."

"And we have met before, you say?"

"Yes, once; had we not, I would not now re-

fuse to tell you my name, or unmask before you."

"Ha! now I recall your voice, and now I know you! Oh, señor! señor! why are you what you are?" and she spoke earnestly.

He raised his hand, unfastened his visor, and removing it with his hat, stood unmasked and uncovered before her.

She did not start, she simply gazed earnestly into the face she now remembered so well, and which she had last seen upon the deck of the brig, which had been so daringly boarded in Long Island Sound by one whom she now knew had been branded as a pirate.

"Ah! I was right; your voice betrayed you to me; and I owe my preservation to—"

"Speak the word, lady," he said, as she paused. "Say that you owe your rescue to one whom the world calls a pirate."

"No, no! I will not say that, for I do not believe you as evil as report would make you; but, be you what you may, I thank you for what you have done for me, and, outlaw though you be, I will never cease to remember you for saving me from a fate I dare not think of; but, señor, what do you here in a city filled with your foes, and where a reward of gold hangs over your head?"

"Business of an important nature brought me here, and one who carries his life in his hand, as I do, lady, is in danger everywhere; but, adieu, and when you hear of the Chevalier Corsair, as men call me, do not believe I am as black as rumor paints me."

He turned quickly away, and impulsively Edna started forward, as though to recall him; but she checked herself, watched him get into the vehicle in waiting and drive away, and then she entered the mansion, her heart aching with sorrow for the man whom she had a second time met, and whom a cruel destiny had driven an outlaw upon the seas.

And, in spite of the scene of bloodshed she had first beheld him in his dark face haunted her, for she had seen him boldly release his vessel from its peril, and now again face two desperate men to rescue her from danger, and his reckless courage and magnificent appearance impressed her deeply, corsair though he was, and she said, half-aloud:

"I must not think of that man, or—I shall love him, and love with me is everything—everything!"

CHAPTER XIX.

DENOUNCED.

GIVING the cabriolet orders, he was driven to a *cabaret*—the *café*, in fact, of Pierre Jacot, where the reader has seen that Don Ivan the Hunchback had his quarters in the city.

It was not far from the Place d'Armes, the heart of the French district of New Orleans at the time of which I write.

But, instead of turning down by the Cathedral, as he should have done to go to Jacot's *cabaret*, or tavern, the driver suddenly wheeled up to the *paré* near the *calabozos*, and sung out lustily in French:

"Ho, guards! Here in my cabriolet is the Chevalier Corsair! Seize him!"

So thoroughly occupied had the corsair—whom the reader now knows as Victor De Lisle—been in the painful thoughts aroused by sight of Edna Enderos, the maiden who had witnessed the first act that made him an outlaw, he had not noticed that the cabriolet was not going in the direction he had ordered, but, recalled to himself, by the ringing cry of the driver, he glanced out quickly, and opening the door on the street side sprung out of the vehicle.

At first the crowd were impressed with the idea of its being a Carnival joke, perpetrated by the cabrioleteer. Even the guards from the calabozos, to whom he had appealed, did not believe him, until the tall form of the corsair appeared, dashing across the street, and the wild cries of the driver warned them that he was in deadly earnest.

"It is Belmont, the Buccaneer! *Sur ma parole d'honneur!* See! he flies! Seize him! seize the Chevalier Corsair, and gold will reward you!" and the coachman, almost beside himself, as he saw the rich reward fading from his eyes, sprung from his box in hot pursuit, while, with loud cries, the guard and crowd joined.

Realizing his terrible danger, the corsair darted into a dark area, or *allée*, but, discovering that he was hard pressed, he turned and faced his pursuers, and the reckless driver was the first to feel his vengeance, for he was seized and hurled back upon the throng with a force that knocked him breathless, and sent a couple of guards and several citizens to earth with his weight.

"Back! if you press me you die!" came in ringing tones from the dark area, and the crowd shrunk back, relying upon the guards to act.

"Don't let him escape! It is the buccaneer, for he captured a vessel on which I was a passenger from Havana, only a few months ago," cried the driver, recovering rapidly when he remembered that if taken, he would finger a large sum of the reward offered for the head of the corsair, dead or alive.

Urged by this determined assertion the

* It is erroneously believed by many people of the North and West that the word *creole* means a *quadranglo negro*; but this is a grave error, for it signifies *native*. In Louisiana a *creole* is a native of the State, whether he be white or black.

guards and citizens rushed *en masse* into the dark *allée*; but the corsair was not there, for he had darted on to the end, and had quickly taken off his heavy cloak and reversed it, with the under side out, and which made of it the cape of a naval officer; then his *chapeau* disappeared, and a naval cap, ornamented with a gold band, was put upon his head, while a heavy beard, also drawn from some inner pocket, quickly covered his face.

Thus thoroughly disguised he had turned into a door, leading into a brilliantly-lighted wine-shop, or *salon*, and in which half a hundred people were gathered at tables, some playing dominoes, others cards, and still more smoking *papilletas*, while all were drinking claret, Spanish wines or *absinthe*.

To slip quietly into a chair, and call quickly to a pretty waiter to bring him a bottle of *noyau* was the work of an instant; but, hardly had it been placed on the table before him, when into the *cabaret* dashed half a dozen guards and three-score of citizens.

"*Sicre!* are you gone mad that you enter a respectable *cabaret* in this manner, *citoyens*?" cried the proprietor, coming forward with angry face.

"No, Monsieur Juan, but we pursue an outlaw; the great Chevalier Corsair!" cried the sergeant, eagerly.

"He is not here. I entertain only honest men, Monsieur Sergeant," was the angry retort, while all who heard the words of the sergeant arose to their feet in excitement.

"Pardon, Monsieur Juan, I did not say you entertained such a guest; but he escaped from a *cabriolet*—here is the *cabriolet*eer, and he recognized him, and he darted into your *allée*, and this is the only way he could have come."

"If he is here, you know your duty; my guests are before you," said the *cabaret*-keeper, evidently not pleased with the idea of having such a famous character seek refuge under his roof, as it might compromise him thereby.

Accompanied by the *cabriolet*eer, the guards began the search, eying every face closely as they came to each person, and having first taken the precaution to lock the *salon* doors in the front and rear.

Quietly, and without the least tremor of the hand, the disguised corsair poured out a glass of *noyau*, and sipped it as complacently as though he were not the hunted man; nor when the searching party neared him did any nervousness appear.

"Ah! here is an officer of the navy! Monsieur, we are in search of a man whom you would doubtless give much to capture. Perhaps you heard? It was the famous rover whom men call Belmont, the Buccaneer, and also the Chevalier Corsair," and little dreaming that the *capote* worn by the man he addressed had two sides, so utterly different, the sergeant of the guards stopped at the table where the outlaw sat, and who answered, quietly.

"I heard your assertion, monsieur; but there must be some mistake, for the corsair chief would hardly come to your city; besides, I saw him aboard his fleet schooner only a day or so ago off the Balize."

"And he escaped you, too, monsieur; as he has many another officer?"

"Yes; his vessel is as fleet as the wind."

"But, monsieur, this *cabriolet*eer says he recognized the chief."

"Then you have seen him before?" and the corsair turned to the driver, who stood by trembling with excitement.

"Oh, yes, sir; I went to Havana to visit my brother, who keeps a *pulperry** there and our good ship was returning when we were chased and captured by the pirate schooner known as *El Maldito*, and which came down upon us like a tornado. Upon the deck stood the Chevalier Corsair, a tall, splendid-looking man, with bronzed face, dark hair and eyes that seemed to look you through and through, while brown mustaches shaded his mouth."

"And the man you saw on the deck of *El Maldito* was the one you now search for?" asked the chief, quietly.

"Upon my honor, yes, monsieur; he went to the rescue of a young maiden, whom two men were abusing the license of Carnival to torture, and he drove her to her home, where he left her; it was then that he was unmasked, and I recognized him, so drove him to the calaboose instead of the Rue St. Anne where he ordered me to put him down; but he was too quick for me and got away."

"It is a pity, for you would have enriched yourself by his capture. And he came in here?"

"Yes, sir; for he could have gone no other place, as we have searched the court into which the *allée* led, and all the doors, excepting the one leading to this *cabaret*, are locked."

"Then, doubtless, he passed straight on into the street, unnoticed by any in the crowd. *Bon soir, messieurs!*" and the supposed officer turned to his wine with the air of a man who desired to be no more worried.

Taking the hint the sergeant and his band of

aids went to the next table, and the next, until they came to a solitary individual, with dark, handsome face, and with the air and dress of a Spanish noble.

"Ah! here is a gentleman who fits your description, *garçon*," said the sergeant, as his eyes fell upon the stranger.

"He is strangely like him, Monsieur Sergeant, though not so handsome, or so tall; but I may be deceived, and as his dress is similar it is best to arrest this one."

"What means this insult?" and the stranger arose to his feet, his face working with anger.

"It means, sir, that you are suspected of being the Chevalier Corsair, and upon such suspicion I arrest you in the name of the municipality of New Orleans."

"Dastard! Lay not your hand on me!" and he threw the sergeant's hand rudely aside, and continued, as he drew a short sword from beneath his cloak:

"I am an officer in the Spanish army, and I will submit to no outrage."

"Seize him! Seize!" rung out cries upon all sides, and, thus urged, the sergeant and his men were about to obey, when the former felt a heavy grasp upon his shoulder, and a deep voice said:

"Beware, monsieur, how you overstep your authority, for this gentleman is what he represents himself. Don Manuel Hernandez, I greet you!"

It was the Corsair Chief who spoke, and advancing, he extended his hand to the Spaniard, who glanced fixedly into his face, and saw there something which caused him to answer hastily:

"And, señor capitán, I am glad to meet you, also. Perhaps these men will believe me now, when an officer of their government vouches for me."

"And you do vouch for him, do you, *Monsieur le Capitaine*?" asked the sergeant.

"I do, most assuredly. This gentleman is no more the Chevalier Corsair, than are you. Look elsewhere for the outlaw," and the disguised chief seated himself at the Spaniard's table and called for another bottle of wine, while the disappointed crowd moved slowly away, the *cabriolet*eer and guards cursing their ill-fortune in losing the reward offered for the capture of the famous sea rover.

And, as the crowd fell back from the table Don Hernandez, the treacherous young kinsman of Don Ivan Enderos, smiled sweetly in the face of the corsair, and said, in a determined, menacing way:

"My dear Captain Belmont, you saved me from a most unpleasant predicament, and one look into your eyes told me who was my preserver, for, though a *cabriolet*eer may mistake me for you, there can be but one such face as yours."

"Don Manuel is inclined to be complimentary," answered the corsair, with a sneer.

"No, I am inclined to seek revenge, for, my daring Chevalier Corsair, the fifty thousand offered for your head will replenish my purse, and I have you now in my power."

CHAPTER XX.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

EVEN taking into consideration that he held the Chevalier Corsair wholly in his power, Captain Manuel Hernandez, the handsome young spendthrift, did not like the smile with which the chief received his assertion of intended betrayal, for there was something behind it that made him feel anything but pleasant.

"Perhaps you did not understand me aright, señor; I said I would hand you over to the authorities and pocket the reward for your apprehension," he said, after a moment's silence, in which the Chevalier had drummed on the table with his knuckles and continued his incomprehensible smile.

"Oh, yes, I understood perfectly, that if Captain Manuel Hernandez would rob his kinsman and his beautiful cousin of their gold, he would willingly betray an outlaw to get a reward offered for him," and the Chevalier was as courteous as though he had no enmity against his companion.

"And I intend to do so, for, curse you, Captain Belmont, after getting possession of the gold you returned it—ay, and the girl too, whom I had gotten into my power."

"I did so, for you falsely represented to me that your kinsman held your rightful inheritance, and that he had no children. I discovered that the gold was his own, and that he had a daughter, whom you were revengeful against for having refused the offer of your hand. I served you, Manuel Hernandez, for once having aided me to escape in Havana when my life was in danger."

"But the debt I more than repaid, as you know, and between us now there is no feeling but enmity; so beware of how you cross my path in the future!"

"Hal! hal! hal! I sought you not, for it was you who came to me," rudely laughed the Spaniard.

"That I know, and I did so, just as you came to my succor once; but you saved me for gold, and I saved you to repay that debt, which, as I

said, has been long overpaid. Now, you go your way and I will go mine."

"Do you take me for a fool, to let fifty thousand pesos go through my hands, now that I have you in my power?"

"No, you are no fool, Captain Hernandez, and therefore you will not betray me," was the calm reply.

"Ah! now you are sensible, Captain Belmont; how much do you offer for yourself?"

"I'll retract my remark—you are a fool, Manuel Hernandez."

"Hal! you fling an insult in my teeth!" cried the Spaniard, with anger.

"Take it as you please, señor."

"But, it is foolish for me to quarrel with a man who has a halter around his neck, so I will simply again ask you what you will pay for yourself?"

"Not one *onza*!"

"What! are you tired of life, and wish to die?"

"Not by the halter, señor; but, I offer you no gold for my life."

"You are rich; you have captured many treasure-ships of my own Government, and fifty thousand pesos are not much for you to put in the balance against your life."

"Not a peso, señor; you have my answer."

"Then I shall call the keeper of the *cabaret*, bid him send for the guards, and turn you over as the Chevalier Corsair, and my visit to New Orleans will not prove wholly fruitless."

"And, señor, if you betray me, I shall make known the fact that the *honorable* Captain Manuel Hernandez, of the Spanish army, entered into a compact with the Chevalier Corsair to rob his kinsman, and—"

"Hold! no one will believe you."

"Then I can summon your sweet cousin, the Señorita Stella Enderos and her maid, Ninetta, as witnesses."

"And where will you find them," sneered the Spaniard.

"Hal! that reminds me: Manuel Hernandez, I placed you and your cousin, with all her father's treasure, upon a fishing *polacca*, whose skipper I paid to run you into the port near where I left you, and, yet, when Don Ivan Enderos was at home, two days after, his daughter had not returned; what means this, Señor Spaniard?" and the eyes of the Chevalier burned like coals of fire as he turned them upon the young officer.

"It means, sir corsair, that I took possession of the *polacca*, and—"

"Nonsense; the skipper had four men with him, and you were but one."

"Gold will accomplish, sometimes, what strength and courage cannot," was the suggestive reply.

"Coward! and you have the Señorita Enderos in your power?" hissed the corsair.

"I have, my handsome Chevalier, and the treasure, too. Nay, more; I have also Belmont, the Buccaneer, in my power," and a devilish light danced in the Spaniard's dark eyes, while his hand fingered nervously the hilt of his short sword.

For a moment both men sat gazing at each other, and then the Chevalier Corsair said, in his deep tones, which showed how greatly he was moved:

"Don Manuel Hernandez, you shall rue this dastard deed."

"No threats, sir chief, for I hold the winning hand in this game, and your life his the stake."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TABLE TURNED.

THE cool manner of the Chevalier again non-plused Captain Hernandez; for when he threatened that the life of the corsair was at stake to see him wholly indifferent to an announcement which he thought would make his face livid, rebounded upon himself, when it failed in the effect he had intended.

"You take it coolly, certainly," he tersely said.

"While there's life there's hope, señor," was the smiling reply.

"But, there is no hope for you—unless you consider yourself worth what the Government is willing to pay for you."

"And I do not; the Government flatters me, and if 'twere known that the stories told of my numerous robberies of American vessels upon the high seas were utterly false, they would not offer a *peso* for my head."

"I command an armed vessel, it is true, Señor Hernandez, and fly a flag of my own liking, but I am not the sea robber that I am represented. But, I am not on trial before you, so it matters not what I am, so I will bid you *adios*."

"Hold! I tell you, sir chief, you are my prisoner," and the Spaniard drew a pistol, at which the Chevalier laughed scornfully.

And, as they thus stood, a party of gentlemen separated themselves from the crowd in the *cabaret*, and went forward to the table that was empty, and near where the two men sat.

At a glance the Chevalier, who was facing them, saw that they were naval officers, and in full uniform, and it but increased his peril, for

* A Spanish tavern, or wine shop.

† About equivalent to "The Accursed."

be, too, in his disguise, was attired as an officer of the United States navy.

There were two officers—a young and handsome captain, and a dashing young midshipman;—the latter was none other than Walter Nevil, who had so attentively regarded the movements of the strange schooner, that, disguised as a privateer, had carried Victor De Lisle into Boston Bay the night of his meeting Marian Dalton in the grave-yard, and his painful visit to his father's home. The other was Harold Sylvester, whose gallantry on a cruise in South Seas against the buccaneers had lately won him a captaincy, and the command of as pretty a brigantine as sailed the ocean.

With remarkable presence of mind, the corsair arose, and pointing to Manuel Hernandez, said aloud:

"Señor, my duty compels me to denounce you, now that I know I am mistaken in you," and leveling a pistol, he covered the heart of the surprised and angry Spaniard, and turning to Captain Sylvester and Walter Nevil, who with others approached, at the ringing denunciation of the Spanish captain, the Chevalier continued aloud:

"Gentlemen, this person was arrested awhile since as the rover known as Belmont, the Buccaneer, and the Chevalier Corsair, and believing that I recognized him, I so told the guard, and kept him from going to prison; but now I denounce him as a robber."

"What! the Chevalier Corsair? Move an inch, sir, and you die!" and Harold Sylvester sprung forward and pressed his sword against the breast of the astounded Spaniard, who shouted fiercely:

"It is false! that man who stands there is the Chevalier Corsair."

A laugh from the crowd followed, and smiling pleasantly the real corsair turned to the crowd:

"Messieurs, is not this the man, whom, believing I recognized as Captain Manuel Hernandez, of the Spanish army, I saved from arrest?"

"It is! it is the very same!" cried a number of voices, for many who came in with the guards had remained.

"Finding my mistake I now arrest him, and as your vessel is doubtless in port, captain, I place him in your charge, I being simply here on special duty," and the Chevalier bowed to Harold Sylvester.

"I thank you, sir; he shall be in double irons within a few minutes. Mr. Nevil, call the men!" and the midshipman, at the order of his commander, went forward, where, at a table, sat half a dozen seamen—the boat's crew—whom their captain had brought to the cabaret to give them a treat of grog.

"Mr. Nevil, see that this famous rover goes at once on board the brigantine, and in double irons; then meet me at the *Theatre d'Orleans*, where I will await you. Hold! if you resist you shall be shot dead in your tracks."

The last remark was addressed to the astounded and livid Spaniard, who was trembling with rage, and whose burning eyes were turned upon the Chevalier with bitterest hatred.

"I am Captain Manuel Hernandez, and that man is the Chevalier Corsair, as I can prove," he hissed forth, in a voice so husky with passion he could hardly articulate.

"Lead him away, Nevil, and if he resists shoot him down; though it were a pity to disappoint the hangman," sternly ordered Captain Sylvester; and, as the seamen dragged Captain Hernandez away, the throng followed, so that the *salon* was nearly emptied of its guests; but the Chevalier turned to the American officer, and said, pleasantly:

"Though we are of the same service, sir, I have not the honor of your name. Mine is Victor, of the *Constitution* frigate."

It was a desperate risk, for Harold Sylvester might have been well acquainted with the officer of that name; but it seemed that he was not, and he answered pleasantly, seeing the rank of his companion:

"I am glad to meet you, Lieutenant Victor, and I owe you an eternal favor in giving over to me that famous pirate, whom I had orders to hunt down and whose vessel I must yet capture; but you shall have the credit of his capture, I assure you. My name is Harold Sylvester, sir, and I command the brigantine-of-war *Muntrice*. Come, let us have a glass of wine together. Here, my pretty girl, a bottle of your best Burgundy, please."

The wine was brought and the two seamen tipped glasses, the naval officer little dreaming of the daring and clever ruse that had been played upon him, and that the famous Chevalier Corsair was then seated opposite to him.

As the chief set his glass down he saw a young girl, and one whom he had noticed glancing out of the cabaret-keeper's private door when the Spaniard was arrested, enter the room and beckon to him.

He could not mistake the sign, for a second time she distinctly signaled to him, and, rising quietly, he said:

"Pardon me, Captain Sylvester, for a moment."

He walked toward the half-open door, which led into a hallway, and stepped within, unnoticed by the officer, who had his back in that

direction, and the others in the *salon* were busy over their cards and dominoes.

"Come, monsieur, for you are discovered; the señor met his consul, who recognized him, and they are consulting outside to seize you now," said the young girl, hastily, and with evident alarm.

"And whom do you think I am, mademoiselle?" asked the Chevalier, with a coolness that almost drove the girl wild.

"I know who you are; I saw you disguise yourself in the area. Come with me, quick, for I would save you, and thus return a service you rendered my lover once—oh, come! for do you not hear the steady tramp of the guard?"

The Chevalier did hear the heavy tread, and they halted at the cabaret door; but he said, quickly:

"You are a noble girl. Lead on, and I will follow you."

And, just then, the startling tones of Midshipman Walter Nevil were heard in the cabaret:

"Captain Sylvester, we have made a terrible mistake, for the man we left with you was the Chevalier Corsair!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A KIDNAPPER CAUGHT.

In the darkness the Chevalier felt a firm grasp upon his hand, and, following without hesitation, he was led along a narrow passage, up a pair of stairs, through another corridor, and then his fair guide paused and said, in a low tone:

"Wait here a minute."

He heard her glide away, and several moments passed ere she returned, and then she said:

"Here is the mask of a priest, cowl, robe and all. Put it on, and then I will lead you, by another way, to the street."

He silently obeyed, rolling up his cloak and hat and hiding it beneath the long, priestly garb, and silently followed her, by another way than that they had come, until they stopped at a door beyond which were heard the voices of merry masqueraders in the street.

"This door leads you out upon the Rue St. Pierre, and you are now so thoroughly disguised you can even return to the cabaret and not be known. Adieu, monsieur!"

She held forth her hand, and the Chevalier, by the light of the hall lamp, gazed into her face, while he said, earnestly:

"I owe you my life, mademoiselle, and you are a noble girl; but, why do you serve me, when, if I remember aright, we have never before met?"

"Monsieur, from my room in the cabaret, for I am the daughter of the proprietor, I saw you enter the area, and quickly make the change that so disguised you; yet I believed it but a freak of Carnival night, until I heard the guards in the *salon* say they were in chase of the famous Chevalier Corsair, and then I determined to save you, for once my lover, Pierre Louis, received a good turn at your hands, for, when you rescued some of your men from prison in St. Jago, he was there, condemned to death for taking life, and you freed him, too. Now I repay the debt of gratitude."

The Chevalier took the little hand in his, slipped a sparkling diamond upon one of the slender fingers, and said, in his low, pleasant tones:

"Mademoiselle, your name, please?"

"Louissette Soto, monsieur."

"A name I shall ever remember, my sweet girl, and that I may not be forgotten, wear this little souvenir, to remind you of your noble deed this night. Farewell."

He passed out of the door before she could reply, and mingled with the gay throng, many a pious Catholic saluting the supposed priest with respect, and little dreaming whom the priestly garb concealed beneath its dark folds.

As if having already decided upon his course, he moved swiftly along through the crowds that thronged the streets, turning his steps in the direction of the old ruined monastery, or convent, where dwelt in solitude, the Padre Bonito.

Evidently he had traversed the dismal way before, for he entered the ruin unhesitatingly, traversed the long, dark corridor, and soon approached the door of the padre's cell; but, there he stopped suddenly, for a low whisper fell upon his ears.

"Is it the señor padre?" he asked, in a low tone.

But no reply came, and still as a statue stood the chief, for, instinctively, he felt the presence of a human being near him, though not a word broke the deathlike silence.

"Padre Bonito, it is I—*El Maldito*," he again said, giving a password he knew would be recognized, if his voice was not.

Still no answer came, and he moved cautiously forward, to suddenly have his extended hand come in contact with a human face.

And instantly his hand was grasped firmly, while again instinct told him his life was in danger, and he threw up his disengaged arm, his short blade on guard.

And just in time, for against the steel clashed steel, while sparks of fire flew from the blades and lighted up, momentarily, the face of each.

"Holy padre, forgive me!" cried the voice of the assailant, while he suddenly dropped his arms to his side; but the Chevalier was now aroused, fully, and in an instant, almost, by an effort of his wonderful strength, he hurled his adversary to the stone floor, and the *click, click, click*, of steel clasps proved he was securely manacled.

"Oh, señor, save me! for the love of the Virgin save me!"

The soft, pleading tones arose from the darkness beyond, and instantly the Chevalier cried:

"I will, lady, for such your voice proves you to be. Have no fear, for you are safe now, and I will look to this gentleman, who has been playing a devil's game."

As he spoke he dragged his prisoner forward a few steps, and taking from his pocket a key, placed it in the lock of the door leading to Padre Bonito's cell.

With a creaking sound the door swung open, and a dim light from the window flooded the room; but it was occupantless.

Raking up the smoldering coals on the hearth, the Chevalier lighted the iron lamp, that stood on the table, and turned upon his prisoner.

"Stand there, sir, and if you make an effort to escape you seal your doom," he said, sternly, while he crossed the room and stepping out into the corridor beheld a form crouching down beside the wall.

"Lady, come with me, for you are in no danger now," he said, in a kindly tone.

She arose to her feet, and he saw that her hands were bound behind her back, and that a gag had been placed across her mouth; but he involuntarily started as he beheld the face turned upon him—a face to remember through a lifetime.

By her rich dress and aristocratic air he saw that she was of high birth, and the jewels she wore proved that she came also of wealthy parentage, while her innocently beautiful face, and exquisitely molded form, would drive an artist into raptures of admiration.

Turning her large, earnest eyes upon the Chevalier, whom she believed to be a priest, she said, in a voice of rare sweetness, though it trembled a little with excitement:

"Holy padre, you have rendered me a service my brother and myself will never forget."

"Lady, I am not as you believe—a priest. This is Carnival time, and I assumed this garb merely for the evening; but I am happy in having served you," and he led her into the cell, where he at once threw aside the artistic face of a priest which he wore, and his robe also, and stood in his uniform of a naval officer, his handsome, fascinating face turned upon the maiden in all its earnestness.

"Oh, monsieur, what a metamorphosis," she cried, in almost childish delight; but he made no reply and turned to the prisoner, who did not seem to relish the change from priest to sailor, and muttered forth:

"I thought you had an iron hand, for one who counts beads and fumbles prayer-books."

He was a fine-looking young creole, with dark face, marked with utter recklessness and dissipation, and yet, withal, had a look of frankness and kindness upon it that was winning, for it softened what was bad in the countenance.

He was dressed as a sailor, and at his belt hung the sheath, from which he had drawn his knife to attack the Chevalier.

"Well, sir, what have you to say for your dastard act?" demanded the chief, sternly.

"Ill-fortune led me to seek gold any way I could make it, señor, and I engaged in a little secret service for the Padre Bonito, whom you doubtless know, as you seem well acquainted with his den," was the reckless reply.

"The Padre Bonito bade you bring this lady here?"

"He did, señor; I was to meet him here at this hour," answered the young man, and yet with a certain air of respect which the Chevalier could not fail to command.

"Lady, your appearance proves you came not willingly here with this fellow," and the chief turned to the maiden, from whose hands he had already loosened the silk kerchief that bound them.

"No, monsieur; I left my home with this man, it is true; but he came with a message, as I believed, from our family priest, to the effect that I should visit a poor woman who was dying. Once here, I doubted the story, but was seized and securely bound, for what resistance could I offer to a strong man such as he is?"

"And you say that the Padre Bonito told you to bring this lady to his cell?"

"He did; this is the Mademoiselle Manine Valverde, the sister of Mr. Noel Valverde. If you know aught of our aristocratic families in the city, señor, you will see that gold was the motive, for they are rich enough to pay a princely ransom."

"Ah! well, sir, I shall punish you as you deserve for this vile act; and the padre, who you say is your master in the villainy, shall answer to me. Now I will secure you so that there will be no danger of your escape before my re-

turn, and, lady, I will then see you in safety to your home."

With a rapid that hung on a pace, he securely bound the unwilling prisoner, and then turned to the maiden.

"Now I am at your service, mademoiselle."

"Hold, señor! Had you not better resume your priestly robe and mask before you risk your face on the public streets?"

The Chevalier turned in surprise upon the man, who smiled pleasantly, as he lay bound upon the stone floor.

"What mean you?"

"I mean that I know you, señor, for you once did me a good turn in St. Iago, when I was going to be garoted, for being too quick with my knife, when a man cheated me at cards."

"Hail your name?"

"Pierre Louis, when I am in New Orleans."

The Chevalier started, for he now saw in the man before him the lover of Louissette, the girl who had saved his life half an hour before.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SCENE IN THE PADRE'S CELL.

It was evident that the knowledge of who his prisoner was greatly moved the Chevalier, for Manine Valverde (whom the reader will remember seeing in her elegant home, the night of Don Ivan's adventure with Jocko) saw, without knowing why, that her preserver seemed troubled; but, throwing off the look he wore, the Chevalier said, quietly:

"I will return and talk with you soon, sir; and should the Padre Bonito come, bid him await me here."

"Whom shall I say, señor?" asked the prisoner, with an innocent look.

"The Chevalier, sir! Come, lady," and he led Manine from the cell, locked the door, and then with his arm guided her along the dark corridor out into the open air.

Once upon the streets, the Chevalier said, in an embarrassed way:

"Mademoiselle, I have a favor to ask of you."

"Name it, monsieur, and willingly I grant it, for what could I refuse you?" was the reply, and once more the beautiful eyes were raised to the face of the Chevalier, but only to meet the saintly-looking mask.

"Does any one know of your leaving home to-night?"

"My maid only; as it was not far, I would not drive, so threw on my wrap, and a half visor to hide my face, and accompanied that wicked man, little dreaming he was leading me into a trap. But my brother, M. Noel, will have them punished," said Manine, indignantly.

"It is that very thing I would speak of, for the favor I would ask is that you do not mention your adventure to-night."

"Why, señor?" and the surprise of the maiden was evident in her face.

"Let me settle it in my own good way, and I promise you that neither the padre, nor his hireling, will ever disturb you again."

Seeing that she made no reply when he paused, he went on:

"It would do no good to prosecute them, and I pledge you my word that they will never again molest you; will you grant my request, mademoiselle?"

"Willingly, and in spite of the mystery that hangs over all, I will trust you," and stopping at the iron wicket, that let into the grounds surrounding the old mansion, where the Valverdes had lived for half a century, she continued:

"Here is my home, monsieur, and I only regret that you taboo my inviting you to visit me, that my brother might thank you for the service rendered me."

"Mademoiselle, my own acts have given me pain often before in my life, and a cruel Fate leads me ever to bring sorrow to my own heart, for, should our paths in life not cross again, a bitter regret indeed would it be to me."

He spoke earnestly, and with a tinge of bitterness, and impulsively Manine Valverde said, while she laid her hand upon his arm:

"And to me, monsieur."

He raised the little hand quickly to his lips, and turned away, with the same feeling in his heart that the maiden had in hers—that did not a wayward Destiny hold them apart, they could love each other, through storm and sunshine, e'en down into the shadows of the grave.

But, as he went along, retracing his steps to the old ruin, the vision of sweet Marian Dalton arose before him, and he remembered her sad, pitiful face, as the moonlight streamed down upon it that night in the cemetery, when she stood by her father's grave, and he groaned aloud, rather than spoke:

"Poor, poor Marian! Your sweet nature won my boyish heart in that happy bygone time; but my own hand has divided us forever, and 'twere better that our paths divided, for from this night I know that the one woman on earth to me I have just met," and after awhile he added: "Ah, me, what strange things these hearts of ours are! They throb with joy, they ache with pain, and yet obey no laws."

He had now reached the ruin, and once more entered its dark and dismal walls, to soon stand at the door of the padre's cell.

Opening the door with his key, he entered, and found his prisoner still lying where he had left him.

"Well, sir, I have returned, as I promised."

"So I see, señor; I knew you would come," was the response of the captive.

"And the padre has not returned?"

"He has not, and I cannot account for it—ha! there is a step in the corridor."

A tap on the door followed his words, and opening it, having just cast a blanket over the bound prisoner as he lay in the corner, the Chevalier beheld before him Pierre Jacot, the keeper of the cabaret where he had met Ivan the Hunchback, and where he always stopped himself when in New Orleans.

"Bah! This old hall is as dark as the approach to Purgatory, and, had I not brought my lantern, I would have shattered my precious shins—*sacré!* why were not our shins placed under the calves of our legs, señor, by Dame Nature—*Mon Dieu!* but you are not Pierre!" and the man started back, as he now saw that he was addressing a different person from the one he had expected.

"No, good Jacot, but I am one whom you well know—see!"

"The Chevalier!"

"Ay, and I came hither to see the padre, after which I was intending to return to my quarters in your cabaret."

"You will have to look elsewhere for the padre, señor."

"What! has harm befallen him?"

"He has his fate in his own hands, Señor Chevalier; if he chose to leave this old stone-pile and skim the seas, it is his own look-out."

"Pierre Jacot, what mean you?" asked the chief, in evident surprise.

"I will tell you all that I know, Señor Chevalier; the padre sailed to-night for blue water, and sent me the following note," and he handed the chief a piece of paper, which was addressed to Pierre Jacot, and which he read aloud:

"JACOT:

"Go to my home in the ruin, and you will find there one Pierre Louis, awaiting me with a captive. Bid him bear her back to her own roof once more in safety, and await at the Cabaret Soto until I communicate with him."

"Tell him to keep sober, or he shall forfeit every peso promised him; and more, for I sail to-night on a cruise that will bring gold untold to me, and those who serve me well."

BONITO.

"And sent he no word to me, Jacot?" asked the Chevalier, who seemed deeply moved.

"None, señor; that is all."

"I noticed a note on yonder table, señor, addressed to 'The Chevalier.'"

The voice came from the corner, and Pierre Jacot gave a cry of alarm, which brought a ringing laugh from Pierre Louis, who certainly took his ill-fortune coolly.

"It is only the one you seek, Jacot; I found him here in his deviltry, and made him prisoner," and, as the Chevalier stepped across the room and took a note from the table, Pierre Jacot said:

"Ah, it is you, Monsieur Louis, is it? Then you have heard the message I brought you?"

"Yes, but the Chevalier has saved me the trouble of escorting the lady home, and now has me in irons, as you see."

In the meantime the chief had broken the seal and was reading the note, with a face that was pale and stern, for what he read moved him deeply, and both Jacot and Pierre Louis saw by his burning eyes that the Padre Bonito had made an enemy of a dangerous man.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BUCCANEER'S OATH.

THE note left by the Padre Bonito, and addressed to "The Chevalier," read as follows:

"SEÑOR:

"When love turns to hatred it is most bitter, and thus now is the feeling I have for you."

"Once we were friends; in fact, so dear was our friendship that, when I, for a crime committed in your far Northern land, was sentenced to die upon the gallows, you freed me from my irons, and in so doing placed the brand of outlaw upon yourself, and became a hunted man."

"And I, returning to my native isle of Cuba, thought to free her from the galling yoke of Spain, and, as a conspirator, was seized, and again stood under the shadow of death, when a second time you released me, for the sake of the auld lang syne friendship when we were chums at college."

"Alas! since then you have swept the seas as a hated pirate, and I, under the guise of a Spanish monk, have found refuge in this old ruin, no one dreaming I was a wolf in sheep's clothing."

"But I tired of this humdrum life, and forgetting not the loved one, your sweet sister, Mabel, to whom, in that olden time, I had been engaged, I sought in my priestly garb that cold clime of New England, and begged her to be my bride, and fly with me to other lands."

"And what was her reply?"

"It crushed my heart, Conrado Costello, to know that my brother was a pirate, but it has broken it to know that you, whom I once loved, are what you are—a murderer, a conspirator."

"Well, señor, from her lips I learned that you had told her of my life, and thus began my hatred for you, which has ripened into a bitterness that makes me your foe, for past friendships I bury forever."

"To-night I cut adrift from the life I lead, and, as chance places in my hand the power, I too will sweep the blue waters as a free rover; so beware of the day that brings you across the path of Conrado Costello, once known as the PADRE BONITO."

Thrice the Chevalier read this strange letter, from a man he had every reason to believe his friend, but whom he would rather have slain with his own hand than see him the husband of his dearly beloved sister, Mabel.

At last he turned to Jacot, and from his face all emotion had gone, as he said:

"Monsieur, I thank you for coming here to serve the padre, and I would feel obliged if you would return to your cabaret and have a horse ready for me, as I must sail to-night, and go at once to where my vessel waits."

"With pleasure, monsieur; I will go instantly and your horse shall await your coming," and Jacot took up his lantern and departed, while, as his receding footsteps died away, the Chevalier turned to Pierre Louis, and releasing him from his irons, said:

"Rise, monsieur, and when you return to the cabaret Soto, say to Mademoiselle Louissette that I have saved you from mischief, and in part repaid her kind act of to-night."

"Louissette, señor! have you met her?" asked Pierre, with a jealous look in his eyes.

"Yes, I was in danger of capture, and knowing, through you, that I had once done you a good turn, she aided my escape; but she will tell you all. Now answer me, are you bound to the Padre Bonito by any ties?"

"The strongest in the world, señor—golden ones."

"Ah! you serve him for gold?"

"True; he saw me in the streets one day, recognized in me a kindred spirit for evil, and to-day engaged me to kidnap the sweet lady whom you rescued from me to-night."

"And his motive was ransom?"

"Yes, señor; he told me he had a vessel ready to sail, and within the week would possess thirty thousand dollars ransom money."

"And your share was to be?"

"One thousand pesos; a fair sum, señor, for a poor devil like me," was the frank reply.

"Serve me well and I'll give you ten thousand, to build a home for yourself and your pretty Louissette; what say you, garçon?"

"Ah, señor! if I had that sum I would never do another evil deed; but, what do you wish of me? I hope not blood-letting, for I don't like grim specters of the dead dogging me," said Pierre, with a shudder.

"I will ask nothing wrong of you; only await tidings of the padre, and when you receive his orders, come first to me."

"Willingly; but where will I find you, señor?"

"Go to the cabaret of Pierre Jacot; he will tell you where to find me. Now, take this purse of gold, and see to it that you do not throw it away upon wine; and here is the key to this cell; keep it, and if you have no better quarters come here, for, if I mistake not, you are on no good terms with the guards, and like night better for a walk than day."

"True, señor; my little peccadilloes cause me to love darkness rather than light; but I thank you for the gold, and will do your bidding."

He pocketed the purse, and locking the door, the Chevalier followed him out of the cell into the lonely street, for there were few dwellings in that quarter. They parted, Pierre Louis to hasten away to secure a disguise and visit Louissette, and the chief to remain, gazing moodily at the ruin.

At last he stretched forth his hand and said, half aloud:

"Conrado Costello, when I risked my life and honor to save you from the gallows, I believed you innocent of the murder of which you were accused, and to be all that was honorable; but now I know you as you are—the murderer of poor Professor Doane—a gambler—the basest of conspirators against your government, and a would-be assassin of your monarch; while, now that you have the power, you have proven yourself a kidnapper of women, and, if I check not your vile career, you may yet drag my beautiful sister from her far-away home and make her a guilty thing; but I will check you, Conrado Costello, for here I swear by the Holy of Holies to hunt you down on land and sea, and may Heaven register my oath!"

He turned quickly and walking rapidly along the streets soon reached the cabaret of Pierre Jacot, where he mounted the horse in waiting, and, still wearing his priestly disguise, dashed off at a rapid gallop, in the direction of the open country.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CONSPIRATOR HOLDS THE WINNING HAND.

WHEN the cunning and imbibed Hunchback arranged with the Padre Bonito to aid him in his vile design of carrying off Edna Enderos, he little dreamed that he was playing right into the hands of a man as wicked as himself.

As the reader has seen, in the foregoing chapters, the Padre Bonito was only a priest in name and dress; but in reality was the Cuban college mate of Victor De Lisle, whose deed, in killing his professor, had caused him to be sentenced to the gallows, from which he had been saved only by the daring and noble friendship of the man whose love for his friend had made him an outlaw and a fugitive.

Still believing in his friend, Victor De Lisle had again saved his life, when in Cuba he was

to be led to the *garote* for a plot to go to Spain and assassinate the Spanish monarch and then raise a conspiracy that would wrest the "ever-faithful isle" from the Spaniard, and place it under the control of himself, for Conrado Costello's ambition aimed high.

Flying to New Orleans, the young Cuban had skillfully disguised himself as a priest, who had passed the meridian of life, and, as his friend, Victor, believed and hoped, had settled down to at least a quiet life; but the wily conspirator had no such idea, and through all was plotting for power once more, that he might yet return to Boston and claim Mabel De Lisle as his bride, though he well knew her brother, knowing at last his true character, would never consent to her union with one so vile.

When, therefore, Ivan the Hunchback let him into the plan he had of carrying off Edna, willingly did the supposed priest consent to aid him, at the same time laying a plan to carry out his own ends, which will soon be disclosed, and thus successfully turn the tables of villainy upon Don Ivan.

Thwarted in his design of carrying Edna off, Don Ivan was content in saving himself, for he knew that the angry populace meant both himself and the padre bodily harm, and he was very thankful for the timely arrival on the scene of M. Noel Valverde; but his consternation at finding the *caravel* in motion, and himself a prisoner in his own cabin, words cannot portray. He raved and cursed fearfully, calling upon every saint in the calendar to bring down anathemas upon the head of the man who had so cleverly tricked him.

After an hour had passed, and the washing waves without proved that the vessel was dashing swiftly along, the companionway was suddenly opened, and there entered a dark, handsome young man with a sinister expression of countenance and a well-knit form.

He was dressed in a black cloth uniform, trimmed with gold lace, and in his sword-belt was a pistol, the companion to one he held in his hand.

"Well, señor, who are you?" and the Hunchback turned fiercely upon the visitor, while Noel Valverde, who had been quietly seated upon a divan, coolly watching the ravings of Don Ivan, arose and faced him.

"I am Conrado Costello, señor."

"Ha! the Cuban conspirator?" almost shrieked Don Ivan.

"Yes, señor, and we last met under my name of the Padre Bonito," was the smiling reply.

"Devil, I will have your life for this!" and the Hunchback, drawing his shortsword, sprang forward; but the ringing command of Conrado Costello stopped him.

"Hold! a score of guns cover your heart, señor."

The Hunchback glanced up the companionway, and his eyes fell upon the gleaming barrels aimed at him. With an angry growl he lowered his weapon, and said, in surly tones:

"What is your will with me, accursed traitor that you are?"

"It is to possess this beautiful vessel, which I claim as a ransom for yourself, Don Ivan."

"What! would you rob me of my vessel, dog of a Cuban?"

"Ah, no; I exchange fairly—give you your freedom for your vessel," was the cool reply.

"Oh, curse you, padre, conspirator or devil, whatever you be!" yelled the Hunchback, almost beside himself with rage.

"Whichever suits your honor, Don Ivan, you may call me; but listen, my esteemed friend: learning of your evil designs of revenge against the daughter of Don Henrico Enderos—"

"What! can this be true, that Don Ivan held feelings of revenge against the señorita Edna Enderos?" asked Noel Valverde, with surprise.

"No; do not believe him, monsieur; it is a part of his vile plot against me to make you think so," declared the Hunchback, quickly.

But Conrado Costello smiled, and then continued:

"Knowing that you intended, on account of your revengeful feelings against the father, a sad fate for the daughter, I determined to turn it to my account, so looked up a crew where I knew just such men as I wanted could be found, and, boarding your beautiful vessel, took possession of it.

"Failing, through that giant-nerved courtier who opposed us, in getting the Señorita Edna into my power, I thereby lost the ransom I intended to ask her father for her, and which would have been heavy, I assure you—"

"Curses rest on you!" growled the Hunchback, and the Cuban bowed and smiled, as though to a compliment, while, turning to Noel Valverde, he continued:

"And, monsieur, as for the freedom of our Hunchback friend here I was to claim this vessel, and thirty thousand pesos as a ransom for the Señorita Edna. I also arranged to draw upon you liberally, and for this purpose lured your sweet sister into a trap— Hold!"

But the cry was unheeded, for Noel Valverde was upon him with the quickness of a flash of light, and, seizing him by the throat, hurled him upon the velvet carpet, while he cried:

"Villain, for that act thou shalt die!"

"Señor, shall we shoot him down?"

The voice came from above, and momentarily checked the enraged creole, who had so quickly mastered his captor.

"You hear, Monsieur Valverde; my lieutenant asks shall it be your life or mine?"

"Señor, you are in his power, for a dozen guns cover you," cried Don Ivan, quickly.

Still the creole stood, his foot upon Conrado Costello's breast and his sword in his hand, as though to strike.

"Shall we fire, señor?" again came from the deck.

"No, Merida; gold is worth more than blood," was the cool response, and to Noel Valverde he resumed:

"You see I spare your life, M. Noel, so take off your foot, and hear the remainder of my story, for your sister is safe, I pledge you."

The young creole silently obeyed, and rising to his feet, as though naught had occurred to anger him, the conspirator continued:

"As I said, M. Noel, knowing that you would give a rich ransom for the safe return of your sister, I lured her from her home through an accomplice; but a lucky accident, as I look on it now, placing you in my power, I sent word to have Mademoiselle Valverde returned to her home and hold you for ransom."

"Can I believe you?" asked M. Noel, sternly.

"I swear it."

"And upon my paying ransom money you will release me?"

"When we reach the Balize I will set you both on board a lugger running back to the city; that is, upon your draft for thirty thousand dollars upon your banker in Havana, where I hear you have large interests, you are free, and this vessel being Don Ivan's ransom he can go with you."

"He can go his way, and I will go mine," haughtily replied the creole; and then he added:

"Of course my slave is to accompany me?"

"Oh, señor, what a black devil that is you have with you! It took a dozen men to subdue him, when he suspected treachery, and two of them will never breathe their *Pater-nosters* more, for he drove that wicked knife of his into their hearts. I will buy him from you, if you will part with him."

"No, I will not sell him for any sum, poor fellow; but I suppose I can go on deck?"

"Upon your *parole* not to attempt to escape."

"I give it," and he ascended the gangway, the Hunchback slowly following, for Conrado Costello said, sneeringly:

"A little fresh air might benefit you, too, señor, and your parole I do not ask, as it is not likely you'd keep it if you gave it, and I do not fear you will run off with the vessel."

With a muttered curse the Hunchback ascended to the deck, and stood near M. Noel, who was moodily gazing at the dark shores, as the fleet vessel, with three-score men upon her decks, was dashing swiftly along down the murky waters of the Mississippi.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A MEMORY OF THE PAST.

TRUE to his promise, Conrado Costello signaled a coasting lugger, upon arriving at Balize, and Noel Valverde, having given his draft for the amount of ransom demanded, went on board, accompanied by Jocko, and slowly followed by Don Ivan, muttering bitter imprecations upon the head of the Cuban, who had caught him so cleverly in his own trap.

Conscious now that Don Ivan was really guilty, and convinced that the threat, which had caused Jocko to spring upon him from the tree, was really meant, M. Noel held no further converse with the revengeful Hunchback, who, in turn, seemed deeply hurt, for the service rendered him by the young creole, as well as his not having insulted him nor shunned him on account of his deformity, had made an impression upon the wretched being, and caused him to feel for both M. Valverde and his beautiful sister a feeling of respect and affection—such as an ill-used dog might feel for one who treated him with kindness, where all others bestowed kicks and curses.

To the skipper of the lugger, who gazed with holy horror upon the Hunchback and dwarf, who had become his passengers, M. Noel offered a large sum if he would crowd on all sail and make the city as soon as possible. The money caused the small crew to spring nimbly to work, and away dashed the really swift craft back into the murky river, while the graceful *caravel* sped away, driven on like a race-horse over the blue waters of the Gulf, her three huge lateen sails and rakish look causing the honest coasters to run inshore, not liking her foreign air and piratical appearance.

With a fair breeze the lugger plowed up the sluggish stream, and in good time dropped anchor in front of the city, when a boat put the unwelcome passengers ashore, for the sailors did not like the looks of Don Ivan and Jocko, and were delighted at their departure.

"Here, Don Ivan Enderos, we part, and forever I hope; but let me say now, and as a warning, that though I know nothing of your cause

for revenge against Don Henrico and his daughter, if harm befall either of them, through your agency, I will visit such a retribution upon you as will cause you to wish you never were born."

The lips of Don Ivan trembled, and moved, as though to reply; but the creole moved quickly away, Jocko at his heels, and, with a sigh, the Hunchback soon after walked in the direction of the cabaret of Pierre Jacot, where, at the suggestion of the supposed padre he had taken up his lodgings.

In the mean time M. Noel walked rapidly homeward, and, upon arriving, asked the negro *concierge* who opened the portal at his coming:

"Where is my sister, Carlo?"

"In her room, monsieur," was the answer, which brought a sigh of relief to the brother, who just then catching sight of Terese, the quadroon maid of the Mademoiselle Manine, he called to her:

"Here, Terese; has my sister been away from home?"

"Only to drive, sir."

"And not alone?"

"Not alone, monsieur," was the answer, with ready lie, for Terese knew of the visit of her mistress the night before, though she did not know where she had gone.

"And she is well, Terese?"

"Yes, monsieur; only fretted that you remained away without giving her word; but the coachman told her you had gone to your plantation down the river, and she felt that it was all right."

"Yes, I have been down the river," and M. Noel went on to Manine's rooms. Each greeted the other affectionately, yet with a certain constraint, for both felt that they had a secret to conceal, as the brother was determined not to alarm his sister by a narrative of what had happened, now that it was all over; but he questioned her closely, and finding that she had nothing to tell him, became convinced that the plan of Conrado Costello had miscarried, or that he had merely told him of a plot against Manine to make him the more readily pay the large ransom demanded for himself.

Still anxious regarding Edna Enderos, he soon after arranged his toilet and departed for the home of Don Henrico, the faithful Jocko at his heels.

Arriving at the mansion Jacques informed him that the Señorita Edna was alone in the parlor; and there he found her, a little nervous from the shock she had received, but as brilliantly beautiful as ever.

In her warm-hearted way she welcomed the young creole, for between the two bonds of love were slowly but surely being riveted, and with rapt interest he listened to her story; but by no word did she betray who was her kidnapper, and M. Noel said:

"You forgot to tell me that the one I met here—Don Ivan Enderos—was your kidnapper."

Her face flushed, but she frankly responded:

"I will not deny it, though I am at a loss to know how you possess the information. Don Ivan it was who took me from my home; yet I can only say in explanation that it is from a feeling of revenge against my father, whose love for me made the Hunchback strike through me."

"And you do not know whom your gallant preserver was?"

Edna looked worried at the last question, but at length said:

"Yes, and I will tell you, M. Noel, though I have not told my father. Do you remember my telling you of our adventure on the Sound some time ago, when our vessel was overhauled by a fleet schooner, and a prisoner of State taken from her by a daring young man, whose act, unfortunately, brought on a scene of bloodshed?"

"Yes; he was a wealthy young Bostonian, and his act caused a decree of outlawry against him, and now I recall the name—Conrado Costello, the Cuban conspirator, was the man he saved."

"Yes; well, it was that man who came to my rescue. Now he is known as Belmont, the Buccaneer."

Noel Valverde sprang to his feet excitedly, and cried:

"Ay, and the Chevalier Corsair, too, from his humane acts! And that man is in this city, mademoiselle?"

"He is, or was."

"With a high price upon his head, dead or alive! It was bold of him."

"He seems utterly fearless of consequences, and in spite of the brand upon him, I cannot but admire him; but it was a shock and a surprise to me, when in my preserver I recognized the young man who daringly boarded our vessel on Long Island Sound, and has since won a name so famous, though linked with crime."

"It is a secret, mademoiselle, though cruel circumstances, not intention, made him what he is, but be he what he may, I thank him for the service he has rendered you," and M. Noel seemed inclined to say more, and of a more tender nature; but Jacques interrupted by entering with a card, which Edna read aloud:

"Harold Sylvester, Captain United States navy," and turning to M. Noel, he said: "An old friend whom I met when at school North, and a splendid fellow, too; so do not leave, M. Noel, but remain and meet him."

Thus urged Noel Valverde resumed his seat, and Jacques ushering the young naval officer into the room, he received a warm welcome from Edna, who asked:

"What lucky star guided you to our part of the world, Captain Sylvester?"

"A sailor's lot, to go where ordered, Miss Edna, for I am sent to the Gulf, pirate-hunting, with headquarters at your pleasant city."

"I am certainly glad to hear that; but you will have to beware of your heart among the New Orleans beauties, or they will steal it from sweet Mabel De Lisle."

"It is that which troubles me, Miss Edna, for I find, since coming here, that Mabel's brother Victor, whom you remember the Government outlawed, is none other than the very pirate chief I have strict orders to hunt down, for I find he is none other than the famous Chevalier Corsair."

M. Noel and Edna exchanged quick glances, while the former said:

"An unpleasant task for you, sir, if, as I understand, the Chevalier Corsair was once your friend."

"Yes, and more:—his sister is one whom I have ever devotedly loved, and, I am not ashamed to confess it, whom I one day hope to make my wife."

The frank confession of the handsome young sailor caused M. Noel to give a sigh of relief, for he had dreaded a rival in him for the hand of Edna.

Finding that his hostess and her visitor were interested in the Chevalier, Harold Sylvester went on to tell the story of his adventure in the cabaret with the buccaneer chief, his clever ruse, by throwing the charge of outlaw upon Captain Hernandez, and his escape, and the return of the Spanish captain wild with rage at the indignity heaped upon him by his arrest for a pirate.

"And he escaped?" asked Edna, anxiously.

"Oh, yes; but no one knows how, and the next I hear of poor Victor he will be at sea, flying his black flag."

"And you failed to recall his face when you sat at the table together?"

"He wore a heavy beard, which completely changed him from the Victor De Lisle I had known in boyhood, and who was nicknamed 'The Magnificent,' for he was a splendid-looking fellow, you remember?"

"No, I never met him in Boston, as he was away when his sister and myself were friends. Poor fellow, Fate has been most cruel to him."

"And the Government to me, to order me to hunt him down; but I must do my duty, even if I have to hang him to the yard-arm of my brigantine, and receive the curses instead of the love of Mabel."

But, before any reply was made to the sad remark of the young sailor, Don Henrico entered the room, his face pale, his manner nervous, and it was evident to all that he had just passed through some painful scene.

What it was that had left its impress upon Don Henrico the next chapter must reveal.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST WARNING.

DON HENRICO ENDEROS was sauntering slowly along St. Charles street, having just come from the fashionable club, of which he was a member, when he felt a light tap on the arm, and, turning, he beheld the hideous face of the Hunchback peering up into his own.

Involuntarily he started, for, since the unsuccessful attempt to carry Edna off, he hoped that Don Ivan would not dare venture to New Orleans again, at least, not for awhile, and he was plotting some means by which he might rid himself of this revengeful being upon his track, to demand the fulfillment of one of the three oaths sworn to in the long ago.

"It would have been better for me had I been left to grow up in the mountains of old Spain, and become a bandit—ay, anything rather than have my life thus made wretched by this accursed being," he said, gloomily, as he walked along on his way home, and just then it was that he turned to behold the object of his thoughts.

"Ah, brother, I am glad we again meet, for I would see you," said the Hunchback, in his snave way, but beneath which lay such a torrent of passion and hatred.

"It is more than I can say for you, Ivan," was the gloomy rejoinder.

"Come, the street is no place for converse such as ours; let us go to my room."

Don Henrico gave a suspicious glance at the Hunchback, as though he dreaded a trap, and, seeing it, Don Ivan said, sneeringly:

"Oh, your life is in no danger, brother mine, for I know you will keep one of your oaths, and I leave it to your choice which."

As though reassured, Don Henrico answered, shortly:

"Lead on; I will follow."

A walk of some moments brought them to the private door of Jacot's cabaret, and the Hunchback led the way to his comfortable room on the second floor.

"Now, be seated, brother Henrico, and we will have a pleasant little chat."

Don Henrico threw himself resignedly into a chair, as he responded:

"You and I can never have one pleasure together, Ivan. Well, what have you to say?"

"I failed in my attempt to carry Edna off."

"So I know, and heartily glad am I that you did."

"Ha! this sounds as though you were getting up courage to keep one of the other two oaths, and give up your life or your gold."

"It were better that I should die, with this treble terror hanging like the sword of Damocles over me forever, for it is slowly killing me."

Don Ivan rubbed his shapely hands together as though in high glee at the misery he caused, and laughed in his soft, musical way, but which jarred so harshly upon the heart of Don Henrico.

After a while he asked:

"Who was the man you paid to rescue Edna, after I had successfully entrapped her?"

"The man I hired? Why, Don Ivan, you dream, for I know not to this day who he was. Doubtless, though, some young cavalier of our city, from what Edna tells me."

There was no doubt upon Don Ivan's mind now that his brother was innocent of having planned a rescue of his daughter; but he added:

"Some young gallant of the town, you say? Bah! he was a man of lion courage and iron arm, for he handled both myself and—and—my accomplice with perfect ease. Did he not make himself known to Edna?"

"It seems not; he drove her home, and went away in the cabriolet he himself hired, refusing to come into the mansion."

"A strange man, indeed; and, now I think of it, his form, his bearing, and his herculean strength recall to my mind one personage who is an exception to his fellow-men."

"And that is—"

"Never mind; he is one whom both my beautiful niece and yourself have cause to dread, should he seek your friendship; but, we wander from the subject, so let us resume."

"What would you wish, Ivan?" and Don Henrico became a shade paler.

"Oh, the keeping of one of your oaths: which shall it be, dear brother?" and the Hunchback smiled as sweetly as though he had asked the most ordinary question.

"Oh God! I do not know," broke from the trembling lips of Don Henrico.

"It must be one, Henrico."

"I know it, alas! I know it but too well; but, Ivan, can you not compromise? Will you not take half my fortune, and—"

"Half your fortune? Why, my darling brother, it slips your treacherous memory that it is my fortune, not yours. Shall I recite the story over again, that you may be edified, and I made more bitter, how our noble father—"

"No! no! no!"

"Of course you nor I are really to blame, dear brother; but then you know the creed that visits upon the children the sins of the father, and while I was cast aside on account of my hideousness, although honorably born, you, the basely born, because of your noble presence, was placed in my shoes, for, innocent little babies that we were, we of course could not object or acquiesce, and our father was content; but my mother loved me, even though I was a horror in the eyes of mankind, and she it was who sought me secretly, and instilled into my heart the heritage of hatred I hold against you, and my heart becoming as deformed as my body, I claimed of you recompense for the honor you held, the riches you squandered, and all I asked was one of three oaths. Which one will you keep, I again ask?"

Don Henrico made no reply, and seemed so overwhelmed with grief, that the Hunchback said, after a moment's thought:

"I will not demand an answer to-night, Henrico, but give you time, as I have a pressing matter to attend to just now; but within the month, it may be sooner, I shall claim the keeping of one of that treble oath, so do not forget. Now come, and I will walk with you on your way homeward."

Silently Don Henrico arose, and the two passed out together, and slowly walked in the direction of the elegant mansion of the unfortunate man, to whom life was rapidly becoming a burden.

As they neared the house, and passed beneath a row of *glorie mundi* trees bordering the pave, a dark object dropped down behind them with a heavy thud, and, turning quickly, from the lips of each broke a startled cry.

"In God's name, what is it?" asked Don Henrico; but Don Ivan made no reply, for he recognized the Black Dwarf, the slave of Noel Valverde, and he felt that his steps were being dogged, for the warning of the young creole came to his memory, and a shudder crept over his frame.

"Come, let us go into the mansion, for the creature seems hardly human," cried Don Hen-

rico nervously, for he had never seen the Dwarf before, or knew of his existence.

"Hardly human! and yet how strangely like myself! No, I will not enter your home, Don Henrico, until I come to claim the keeping of your oath."

"But the monster may attack you?"

"Ha! ha! ha! how generous on your part to think of me, Don Henrico, when it would be a consummation devoutly hoped for by you did he kill me! But remember my warning," and the Hunchback turned away without another word, while Don Henrico hastily entered his own door, giving one nervous glance over his shoulder, and discovering that the Dwarf was slowly following on the steps of the Hunchback.

"He cannot be his companion, for he started with alarm, as I did, at sight of him; and yet, they are strangely alike in deformity! Ah, God grant that Ivan Enderos may die by the hand of the black monster!" and with this prayer upon his pallid lips he entered the parlors of his own home, nervous and trembling.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LAKESIDE CABIN.

It will be remembered that when the Chevalier Corsair left Jacot's cabaret, it was on horseback, and he rode out into the country, taking the road leading along a lagoon, and bordering a cypress swamp, which stretched away in the direction of the lake.

It was a lonely, gloomy ride, with the croaking of the frogs, the shrieking of the nightbirds, the splash of the alligators, and the sighing of the winds through the moss-draped trees; but, unheeding these dismal sounds, and even unnoticing the trilling of a mocking-bird in a magnolia forest in the distance, the Chevalier rode steadily on, his horse needing no urging from the master, who seemed wholly wrapt in his own meditations.

At length he came to a path that branched off to the left, and led through a dense forest that bordered the beach, not far distant, for the wash of the waves mingled with the other sounds.

A ride of half a mile brought him to an opening, in which stood an humble white cabin, a lamp gleaming forth from its windows in the rear, and which looked out upon the pathway, for the roadway had stopped at the entrance to the timber.

The cabin, though of one story, was built with several wings, and occupied considerable ground. It was known to the Chevalier to be a resort of lake fishermen, and, some supposed, even the rendezvous of the smugglers; but, though a close watch had been kept upon the occupants, nothing had ever been discovered against them by the keen-eyed officers of the law.

Riding slowly by, the Chevalier seemed anxious to avoid detection; but a loud laugh suddenly caused him to bring his horse to a halt, while he distinctly heard the words:

"If the captain don't come to-night, lads, we'll be merciful and set the lady free, while we fingers his gold ourselves."

The remark was in Spanish, a language the Chevalier spoke fluently, and it caused him to ride off into the forest, fasten his horse, and return on foot, and cautiously, to the cabin.

Approaching by the side, for it was only half a score rods from the lake shore, he came to a halt upon the rude porch in front, and could distinctly hear voices within, and a *patois* French mingling with the low Spanish of the West Indies.

But it was not the foreign tongues that interested the Chevalier, but the subject of their converse.

"Messieurs, you order more of your Spanish wine, I believe?" asked a voice in French *patois*, and who was evidently the keeper of the seaside tavern, or cabaret, for such the place was.

"Yes, more of our native grape-juice," replied one in English, and he added, in Spanish:

"We will take a bottle for every quarter of an hour the captain detains us here, lads."

"Bravo!" shouted half a dozen voices, and the speaker went on:

"You are making an *onza* a day, camaradas, and I, as captain, two *onzas*, so we should not complain, for it beats fishing off our own green isle, to which we can soon return with gold for our families."

"You mean the treasure-kegs, camarada?" asked a voice.

"Oh! if aught has befallen the captain, and we take these, we'll be as rich as the Dons of old Spain; but we must be honest yet awhile, for the captain may return all right."

"And the señorita?"

"Ah, poor lady! I wish she were not on our hands, and I fear me the *capitan* is cruel to her; but that is his business, not ours, for we are paid to keep our mouths shut, and not to let her escape."

The last words heard by the Chevalier Corsair seemed to determine him as to his course, for he arranged his pistols and blade to hand and tapped lightly upon the door.

Instantly there was a dead silence within, and again he rapped.

"Look to your weapons, camaradas," said a voice, evidently the leader, who had before

spoken, and in a loud tone, and in French, the landlord asked:

Still wearing his priestly garb, the Chevalier answered, in a deep voice:

"A holy father seeks rest beneath thy roof, my son."

A bar was removed, a key grated in the lock, and the door swung open, and in stepped the chief.

There were six men in the room, besides the diminutive French landlord. They were muscular, bold-looking fellows, dressed in boots, duck pants, woolen shirts and tarred tarpaulins, while in their belts were a knife and pistol.

The room was large, had a bar at one end, and behind it shelves filled with bottles, while several tables, benches and chairs comprised the furniture.

At the entrance of the supposed padre all arose and crossed themselves devoutly, while the leader of the West Indian fishermen, or coast traders, for such they were, stepped forward and said, with deep respect:

"Thy blessing, padre!"

With well-feigned piety the Chevalier bestowed his blessing, and, dashing off a glass of choice wine handed him by the keeper, he said, addressing more particularly the leader, and in Spanish:

"You are the crew of the West Indian lugger, under charter of Captain Manuel Hernandez?"

"We are, padre," was the answer.

"I left the captain to-night, and I have orders for you, my son."

"Ah! no mishap has befallen him, then?"

"A mishap, yes; but it will not be of long duration, yet detain him a sufficient time to annoy the *Señorita Stella*, who is on board your lugger, and I have come to take her into my keeping, as also the treasure-kegs you have on board."

"Sent he no written order, holy padre, or his signet?" asked the lugger's captain.

"Is more needed than the word of the priest of thy church, my son?" asked the Chevalier, sternly.

"No, no; forgive me, holy father; but I have in my keeping a fair lady left with me by the captain to guard with my life, and also a treasure of thousands upon thousands of *pesos*, and it is but natural I should be careful in what I do, for our master has paid us liberally, and left us with the intention of returning hither last night."

"You are forgiven, my son; your lugger is at anchor, he said, in—"

"The mouth of the lagoon half a mile distant, holy father. What are thy wishes?"

Before the Chevalier could reply there resounded without the rapid clatter of hoofs, a sudden halt was heard, and into the still open door strode Don Manuel Hernandez!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

At the sudden, unlooked-for, and certainly undesired presence of Captain Manuel Hernandez, the very personage from whom he was professing to be a messenger, it is unnecessary to state the Chevalier was taken aback, though he did not exhibit by act or word any disconcertion, for he had been too often in desperate situations, where cool courage alone could save him, to exhibit nervousness, even though the odds were fearfully against him.

"Ah, my son, I am glad you have come, for I was just telling your camaradas that I had seen you in the city," said the Chevalier, with the utmost *sang froid* of manner and speech.

Don Manuel, in spite of the evil life he led, held the priesthood of his church too sacred to contradict a padre, so said, inquiringly:

"Then we have met before, holy father? Forgive my treacherous memory."

This remark was a stunner to the West-Indian crew, and the lugger's skipper said hastily:

"Señor, the holy father told us he came as a messenger from you."

A movement of the Chevalier's arm caused Don Manuel Hernandez to start, while he cried out in a loud tone:

"What means this, padre? Do the priests of America go fully armed, and wear uniforms beneath their robes?"

Without replying the Chevalier suddenly bounded forward, his trusty blade in one hand, and his pistol in the other, and the Spaniard was thrown to the floor with violence, while one of the lugger's crew who opposed him fell dead in his tracks.

And then loud cries, curses, and rushing of feet followed; but out of the open door had the Chevalier bounded, and throwing himself astride of the patiently waiting steed of Don Manuel, he dashed off like the wind, followed by a volley of pistol-shots and imprecations, as he disappeared, apparently unhurt, in the dark magnolia forest.

"After him, for it is Belmont, the Buccaneer! A hundred onus to the man who brings him down!" cried the discomfited Captain Hernandez, springing to his feet livid with rage, and the hope of the golden reward sent the West

Indians into the woods in hot pursuit, one of them to utter a howl of terror, and come flying back toward the cabin, while his cry of alarm startled the others into a rapid retreat.

"What is it, sir?" yelled Captain Hernandez, who was rubbing himself after his fall, which had been by no means a light one.

"Oh, señor! the devil! the devil!" howled the frightened man, crossing himself, and rapidly mumbling his prayers.

"The devil! what mean you? Speak, or I will prove a worse enemy than his Satanic majesty," and the Spanish captain drew his sword.

"Oh, señor! it was in truth the devil! horns, hoofs and tail, and I ran right into his arms and felt his hot breath in my face. At first I fell down to pray, but feeling his cloven hoofs, and knowing he liked not prayer, I sprang to my feet and fled. Ah, *santissima! santissima!* my soul will be damned."

The manner and wild recital of their comrade impressed all, even to Captain Hernandez, and the flight of the Chevalier was momentarily forgotten; but, remembering how dangerous a foe he was, the Spaniard determined to face even the devil to get him in his power, so, calling to the men to follow him, he drew his sword and dashed into the forest, followed however only by the lugger's skipper.

A loud laugh, and then bitter curses, poured upon the luckless head of the devil-finder, followed, and the captain came out of the woods leading the horse that had been ridden by the Chevalier.

"It is the buccaneer's steed, you egregius fool! Had I known before he was here I would have followed in hot haste, and perhaps overtaken the rover; but now we have no time to linger, for his vessel is evidently lying in some lagoon not far away, so come! to your boat, men, and we'll send the lugger flying out of danger!"

It was evident that the lugger's crew were anxious to redeem themselves in the eyes of the man who held the purse-strings, and giving their dead comrade and the Chevalier's horse in the keeping of the tavern-keeper, they hastened to the water's edge, where a yawl was drawn up upon the sands.

Shoving it quickly into the water and springing in, Captain Hernandez himself taking the tiller, they pulled with strong stroke out upon the lake, and then headed parallel with the shore until a darkly-wooded point of land appeared ahead.

"There lies the lugger, señor captain," announced the skipper, pointing to where the masts and hull of a vessel were dimly visible, and heading for it, the boat soon ran alongside.

"Now, up with your anchor, and spread sail, Tolosa!" ordered Don Manuel.

"Whither, señor?" was the quiet question of the West Indian skipper.

"Out into the lake, and then along the coast until we discover some secluded lagoon to hide in, until the corsair puts to sea, for he dare not remain long in this quarter."

"Si, señor," and the anchor was soon up, the sails set, and before a six-knot breeze the swift lugger was gliding along over the dark waters, and Manuel Hernandez breathed more freely, for hope of escape was before him, while capture meant the loss of the *Señorita Stella Enderos* and the treasure which he had so vilely taken possession of.

But, just as the dark shores were growing dim in the distance, he gave a sudden start, strained his eyes, and then burst forth in bitter maledictions, for, relieved against the black background of the Magnolia forest, there sprang into view the white, spectral form of a large vessel—a schooner under full sail.

"Señor, it is *El Maldito!*" said Tolosa, in a husky whisper.

"Curse you! I have eyes; and curse him! he has, too," was the savage retort, and turning to the skipper, he continued fiercely:

"Cover this creeping craft with every inch of canvas she can spread."

"Si, señor; but *El Maldito* sails like a whirlwind," was the ominous reply, and again bitter curses broke from the lips of Captain Manuel Hernandez, for despair and the fear of death clutched with icy fingers at his heart, and the crimes of his lifetime tramped like grim specters before his vision.

And, under all the canvas that would draw, her lateen sails bellying out as hard as boards, and her skipper keeping her on her course as true as an arrow's flight, the swift, tough homely lugger flew over the waters, leaving a foaming wake far behind her, and getting eight knots out of a six-knot breeze.

With an anxious face Captain Manuel Hernandez watched her rapid flight for a few moments, and then turned his gaze upon the phantom-like vessel dashing on in pursuit, for it was now evident that she was in chase.

"Holy Virgin! she gains upon us," he cried, in a pitiful tone.

"It is *El Maldito*, señor," was the laconic response of Tolosa, his hand as firm as a rock upon the tiller.

"In the devil's name, what matters that, Tolosa?" angrily asked the Spaniard.

"A curse flies faster than a blessing, señor."

"Ah! meaning this craft for the blessing! Well, my swarthy skipper, your judgment is a little off. I wish you were right, that we might be blest by escaping, but it looks doubtful to me."

"And to me, too, señor capitan, for she gains rapidly, and ere long we will have iron pitched into us, if we don't heave to."

"What! do you think I would surrender to yonder man? Not if he blows your lugger, and all on board, to the devil, would I come to at his order; but, he dare not fire in these waters, as it would bring the American cruisers upon him."

"The Virgin grant us protection, señor; but, *El Maldito* is coming after us like a tornado."

The words of Tolosa were true; the schooner was rushing on in chase like the wind, and ere long the end must come, be it what it might.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN OATH AND A PLEDGE.

As the West Indian lugger drove on before a breeze that was constantly increasing in strength, Captain Manuel Hernandez paced the small deck with a nervous step, for each glance astern showed him that the pursuing schooner was steadily gaining, for only a mile divided the two vessels now.

Muttering bitter imprecations, he descended into the small, yet not uncomfortable cabin, and there paused as he beheld upon a sofa, that stood beneath the transom, the form of a woman.

Her face was buried in her hands, and her whole attitude was that of dejection; but hearing his footstep she raised her head, and the beautiful, though pale countenance of the *Señorita Stella Enderos* was revealed.

"Ah, my sweet cousin, you wear a dejected look for one who hopes for succor soon," said Don Manuel, with a sneer.

"It is the dread that a cruel Fate may yet keep me in your power that disheartens me, for, when I glanced out of the fort a moment ago, it seemed that the schooner did not gain on us," she answered, in a disconsolate tone.

After a pause of a moment the Spaniard said:

"Stella, if I have seemed to treat you harshly, it is because of my love for you, and—"

"Silence, sir! does your manhood permit you to use such argument to defend your cruelty?" she cried, with flashing eyes.

"You have been cruel to me, Stella, for you have known well that I loved you ever since you were a little girl, when I taught you to ride, and to sail a boat, and—"

"Do not recall a past when I believed you honorable, Don Manuel; you showed your true character too soon, and won my dislike, and now that I know you as you really are I hate you, for you have robbed my poor father of his child and his fortune."

"All that I took from him I have on board this lugger—yourself, the gold, and the jewels, and I tell you again, as I told you often before, if you will consent to be my wife, I will return you to your father, and with you his treasure."

"Never, sir! you are far worse than the pirate chief, for from you I should look for protection; but he gave me my freedom, and the treasure of my father, which you had plotted to rob him of, and when he placed me on board this vessel he believed that I was to go at once to my home; but you, Manuel Hernandez, led astray, with your promises of gold, the poor men on this craft, and you have held me prisoner, hoping to make me consent to become your wife, and go to my father with the falsehood upon my lips that you protected me, and saved my honor and the treasure; but I swear to you, señor, I will never consent so to debase myself in my own eyes, be the consequences what they may."

She had spoken in a low but distinct and firm tone, and Manuel Hernandez knew well that he could not break her will, and with her refusal ringing in his ears, and the schooner steadily gaining upon the lugger, he was in despair; but he determined to try once more, and said:

"Cousin Stella, do you know what craft it is in pursuit?"

"I do; you believe, at least, that it is the schooner known as *El Maldito*, and whose chief set me free when, through your plot, I fell into his hands."

"Yes, it is *El Maldito*, and the Chevalier Corsair in command, and if he takes us, I will be put to death."

"Your own actions only will be the cause, cousin Manuel."

"Granted, Stella; but would you see me die?"

"I would not care to."

"Remember the past happy days we spent together at the *hacienda*, when you cared for me, and called me your lover-cousin—"

"Those days are in the past, Manuel, and if they lost their joy as years went on, it was your hand that caused them to vanish."

"I will admit that, cousin Stella; but remembering what we have been to each other, will you see me die at the yard-arm, when you can save me?"

"Why should the Chevalier Corsair put you to death, when a short while since he gave you your freedom willingly?"

"Because we have met since, in New Orleans,

and it is war to the knife between us now, and if an accident should happen to the lugger, and we fall into his power, I know that I would have to die, unless you saved me."

"And how can I save you, Manuel?"

"By telling a falsehood, cousin mine; by saying that I did not, against your will, bear you away in the lugger, but took you to New Orleans, where you became my wife."

"No! no! no! I cannot do that."

"Then I must die."

There was something in his tone so sad and reproachful, that it went to her tender heart, and she said quickly:

"No, I will plead with him for you."

"Your pleading will do not an atom of good, for he will feel that he has been injured by my act in carrying you off against your will, after he has set you free, and he will put me to death, while, if I let him know that it was because of the hatred your father bore me, that you went with me and became my wife, and beg him then to spare your husband and your treasure, he will do it, for I know the man."

"And if I tell this base falsehood, Manuel, what is to be my fate when he lets us go free?"

"I will carry you by night to your home, and your treasure too, only I will beg that you let it be known that I was captured by the buccaneers in trying to save you, and then, cousin mine, I pledge you never to cross your path again, and to lead a different life."

"Is this pledge given, Manuel, only in the face of death?"

"No! no! for what care I for death? A soldier, it may come to me at any time, and without you, I care little to live; I give you the pledge in good faith, and—"

"The schooner is gaining, señor, and the lugger is driven her best," said Tolosa, calling out down the companionway.

"You hear, cousin Stella?" said Don Manuel, sadly.

Rising and approaching him, the beautiful girl laid her hand upon his arm, and her voice trembled as she spoke:

"Cousin Manuel, if word, even a falsehood, or act of mine could save you from a cruel and ignominious death, I would see your phantom form ever before my eyes, if I refused it, and I grant your request—"

"Bless you, Stella."

"Hear me! I grant it, but upon one condition."

"Name it."

"That you call Tolosa into the cabin, and in his presence, swear that you will return me at once, and in safety to my home, ay, and my father's treasure with me; will you do this?"

"Yes, willingly, cousin mine, and from this moment I will lead a changed life."

"God grant that you may; now call the lugger's captain."

Don Manuel hastened to obey, and when the two came into the cabin, the maiden said:

"Señor Tolosa, my cousin is to take an oath, that if I tell the captain of the pursuing vessel that I willingly went with him to New Orleans, and there became his wife, and beg his release with mine, that he will at once have you sail for our island, and place me in safety, with my father's riches, at my own home, and I will pledge myself to pay yourself and crew liberally."

"It is as you wish, señorita; I am but your slave," said Tolosa, politely.

"Now, Don Manuel Hernandez, kneel."

With a scowl the Spaniard obeyed, and drawing a gold crucifix from her bosom, she said:

"Press this to your lips, and swear by all you deem sacred on earth or in heaven that you will keep the pledge you have made me, under penalty of eternal damnation."

Her voice fairly rung in its intensity, and involuntarily Don Manuel and Tolosa uncovered their heads, while the former turned a deadly hue, and the hand that held the crucifix trembled violently, as he said in a low tone:

"I swear!"

"It is enough; now I will keep my pledge to you; come, I will go on deck with you."

She threw her mantilla around her, drew her black lace veil over her head, and went to the deck, and gave a glance astern.

Instantly a cry broke from her lips, for the schooner, looking like a huge, flying phantom, was but a short distance away, and rushing down upon them like a whirlwind.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CHEVALIER'S PRIZE.

WHEN the Chevalier Corsair dashed away from the lake-shore cabin, on the steed of Don Manuel Hernandez, he soon placed the shelter of the woods between himself and danger, though his horse reeled under him, hard hit by the shots of his foes.

But he urged the frightened and suffering animal on, and, apparently fully understanding the way he was to go, guided him free of all obstacles in the darkness, until he dashed out upon the open beach.

There the horse staggered badly, and dismounting, the corsair patted him kindly on the neck, saying sadly:

"Poor fellow, you have saved me and your life has been the sacrifice; but the brute must ever yield to the human."

With another caress he left the dying animal, who sunk down in his tracks with a low moan, and walked rapidly along the beach until it wound around into a lagoon, overhung with moss-draped trees.

Placing his fingers to his lips he gave three shrill, distinct whistles, and they were answered by the flash of a light out on the waters, or apparently from the other shore.

As if satisfied, he waited patiently, quietly pacing to and fro, and seemingly little caring for the pursuit that had followed his rapid exit from the cabin.

He had not long to wait before a dark object was visible upon the lagoon, and soon it touched the shore, almost at his feet, and proved to be a boat with four oarsmen.

"Welcome, señor capitán; we are glad to see you back," said the bow oarsman, politely.

"Thank you, Jacinto; is all right on board?"

"As trim as though you were there yourself, sir; back to the schooner, sir?"

"Yes," and at the answer the coxswain gave the order to give way, and the boat started upon its return.

A row of two cables' length and the dark shore on the other side of the lagoon loomed up; but the boat continued straight ahead until it suddenly ran alongside what was now visible as a schooner, but so moored in under the overhanging branches of the trees, and draped with the funeral gray moss, that it would not be visible even in daylight to any one passing upon the water.

At the gangway the Chevalier was met by a young man, with a frank, fearless face, as shown by the light from the companionway, and his attire, an undress of black, trimmed with silver lace, proved him to be an officer.

"Welcome, señor; it is with such dread that I see you trust yourself alone, that it is a joy to have you return," he said, in an honest way that proved his greeting was sincere.

"Thank you, Alvarez; but get the schooner at once under sail, head out of the lake, and then come into my cabin," and the Chevalier descended into his own luxurious quarters, for the interior of the vessel was oriental in its comforts and beauty.

Throwing aside his disguise and the costume he had worn, he hastily robed himself in a uniform, consisting of white velvet pants, a *la* Mexican in style, for they were slashed up the outer seams with yellow silk set in as far as the knee, and gold lace stripes and small gold buttons running from his waist down; his jacket was of black velvet, the sleeves of which were like the pantaloons, trimmed with lace and buttons, and upon either shoulder was a gold knot signifying his rank, while a naval cap and a sash of silver thread encircling his waist completed his very elegant uniform, with the exception of a handsome pair of pistols, a jeweled knife and a short sword he wore in a belt, which the sash concealed.

Hardly had he completed his toilet, when Alvarez Navarro, his lieutenant, and a dashing, sad-faced young Cuban entered, and said, while he gazed with admiration upon his superb chief:

"Señor captain, the schooner is under way, and we are going along at about eight knots."

"Then I will accompany you to the deck," and glancing around him over his beautiful vessel the chief gave orders to the helmsman to head inshore and run parallel to it, while every man was told to keep a look-out for a sail.

The schooner, even in the darkness, was noticeable as an exquisite model of symmetry, and her gaunt hull, tall, tapering and rakish masts, proved that she could cut swiftly through the waters, and be driven under canvas enough for a vessel of twice her tonnage.

Her decks were in perfect order, her guns shining like gold, every small-arm in its place around the masts, and her crew of eighty silent and on the alert; in fact, no cruiser under a legitimate flag was in better sailing and fighting trim, or could show better discipline, or a finer-looking set of men to handle her in action, though they were gathered from a score of nations, from the China seas to the Gulf of Mexico.

Gliding along with an easy, silent motion, there was something ominous in the vessel, which looked like a huge nightbird of the deep looking along the dark shores for some prey to pounce upon.

"Señor, a light lifts yonder!" said Alvarez Navarro, pointing off the starboard bow.

"I see it; it is in the window of the *cabaret* on the shore, and from which I escaped a short while since; ah! yonder is the lugger now, Alvarez," and as the Chevalier spoke a dozen voices cried out:

"Sail ho!"

"Ay, ay, I see it, lads; helmsman, head for yonder craft, for it is the game I seek," and out from the shelter of the dark shores sped the beautiful vessel, and on in pursuit of the lugger she darted with increased speed, for the wind came free, and like a thing of life she

seemed to feel that there was duty for her ahead.

And thus the chase went on, the schooner gradually gaining and the lugger heading inshore, as though it was the intention of her captain to beach her, and escape with the loss of his vessel.

"I can send a shot into her, señor," said Alvarez Navarro.

"Not on any account, señor, for the one I hope to save may be the victim of the shot."

The reply of his chief caused the young lieutenant to glance more attentively through his glass at the small vessel, for he had wondered why the Chevalier was in pursuit of game that hardly seemed worth the catching, and he said, after awhile:

"That looks to me like the lugger we sent the señorita and the gold off in, for she has two patches in her sail just like that craft."

"You are right, señor; it is the same vessel, and the Señorita Enderos is still on board," was the quiet response; but it surprised the pirate lieutenant immensely.

"Then there has been treachery somewhere, señor chief."

"There has; the same one who proved a traitor to his own kindred is now proving even worse to the Señorita Enderos," and the Chevalier went on to tell of what had happened to him in the city, and also at the cabin on the shore, to the great surprise and indignation of Alvarez Navarro, for, like his chief, he was ill-suited to a pirate's life, and only a base wrong against him had forced him to fly for protection to an outlaw deck.

As the chief went on with his story, the schooner continued to gain more rapidly upon the lugger, especially as the wind grew stronger, and at length her tall clouds of canvas almost towered above the deck of the lugger.

"Alvarez, take the helm and shave the stern of the lugger, so that I can spring on board with half a dozen men; then shorten sail and keep alongside until I hail you."

"Ay, ay, señor," and the Cuban stepped to the helm, while the Chevalier passed forward, calling to about a dozen of his crew to follow him.

And upon the sharp bows of the schooner the little band took their stand, and waited, while they drew nearer and nearer the lugger.

"Schooner, ahoy! do you intend to run us down?" cried Manuel Hernandez, in angry tones, as the long, needle-like bowsprit hovered over their heads.

"My helmsman has his orders, sir," was the stern reply of the Chevalier, and, turning, he called back to Alvarez Navarro:

"Let her fall off—steady! Follow me, men!"

With a bound the Chevalier was upon the lugger's deck, and following him came his men, as nimble as cats, and ready for combat, should the order be given.

"Well, sir, as you have the power, and we dare not resist, you do as you please, yet I would like to know why you thus board an honest craft?" said Don Manuel, placing himself with drawn weapon before the Señorita Stella.

"It is to protect that lady, Manuel Hernandez, from a villain," was the calm response.

"Hail this to my teeth, sir pirate?"

"Ay, and worse: we are not now in New Orleans, with you holding the winning hand, Captain Manuel Hernandez, and I would advise you to lower your tone, for my yard-arms are conveniently near, as you perceive, and I have boarded this vessel to take from you the lady you have so cruelly wronged, and to punish you for your treacherous act."

"How mean you that I have wronged this lady?"

"I released her upon learning of your iniquity, and placed her in the keeping of that man," and he pointed to Tolosa, the lugger's keeper.

"And she preferred to remain under my protection and became my wife," was the triumphant reply of the Spaniard.

"Hail! Is this true? Señorita Enderos, I appeal to you?"

"Yes, señor," was the firm response.

"Now what have you to say, señor pirate? She went with me to New Orleans and there became my wife, intrusting herself and her treasure to my keeping, and I am now returning both to the *hacienda* of my kinsman, Don Ivan."

"Can this be true? The Señorita Stella your wife?" asked the Chevalier, with withering scorn in his tone, and which called up the red blood into the maiden's face, which the darkness alone prevented from being seen.

"You have heard the lady's own words, sir corsair; need you ask more?"

"I would ask her kind permission to make her a widow within the hour, and run you up as an ornament to my vessel," was the stern answer, and it sent a cold thrill to the Spaniard's heart, and caused the maiden to say, earnestly:

"Señor, I already owe you much, far more than I can ever repay; but yet I beg of you to permit my—my husband, to go in safety, as you have once done before, and my every prayer shall remember you, for you are not

what men call you, not the guilty being the world would make you, but a man of noble impulses, and one whom an unkind Fate has cursed most cruelly."

For a moment the Chevalier was silent, and the words of the maiden seemed to deeply move him; but then he said, in his low, musical tones:

"Lady, I fear you have laid out for yourself in life a rugged path to pursue, and imbibed the draught your noble nature should drink, with the dregs of sorrow; but you know best, and if you ask the life of your husband, I grant it, and you are free to go; but for your sweet sake only do I this."

"From my heart I thank you, señor," and taking his hand, Stella Enderos, before he was aware, imprinted a kiss upon it.

He started visibly, and to hide his emotion, called out:

"Ho, El Maldito!"

"Aho! the lugger!" came back in Alvarez Navarro's voice.

"Lay the schooner to, and we'll bring the lugger alongside."

"Ay, ay, sir," and five minutes after the Chevalier Corsair and his men sprung upon his own deck, while the two vessels stood rapidly away from each other.

But hardly had they placed half a mile between them when a flash was seen on the lugger, a faint report heard, and then a cry for help came over the waters:

"El Maldito, aho! aho!"

Springing to the wheel the Chevalier changed the schooner's course, and his ringing orders sent his men to their posts, while he shouted:

"There is trouble yonder, and woe be to the man who has caused it."

But, as the schooner headed for the lugger, suddenly a bright flash illumined the waters, and the roar of a heavy gun echoed against the dark shores, while out from the shadow swept a vessel-of-war, in hot pursuit of the corsair craft.

"Ha! that is the coast-guard cruiser, Alvarez, and a good sailer, as we have had cause to know," said the Chevalier, coolly.

"Yes, sir; there goes her gun again! and see! it is the cutter," and once more above the schooner rushed a solid shot.

"The lugger has put about, sir, and is heading back toward the Lake, as though to enter Pontchartrain, evidently knowing we dare not follow, with yonder cruiser to cut us off."

"But we do dare follow, Alvarez, so spread sail after the lugger, and never mind the cutter," said the Chevalier, with determination, and with her crew at her guns, and a deathlike silence upon her decks, El Maldito bounded away in pursuit of the little craft, which was evidently using every effort to escape, while, the cutter-of-war, half a league away, was coming on under a cloud of canvas, having evidently recognized her foe as the fleet-winged craft of the Chevalier Corsair, which often before had so cleverly eluded capture, but which now seemed rushing into a trap from which there could be no escape, as the firing of the guns would bring other American cruisers to the scene, the commander of any one of which would give ten years of his life to be able to capture the daring Belmont, the Buccaneer.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DOUBLE CHASE.

As the eastern skies grew gray with approach of dawn, the wind increased to half a gale, causing the little lugger to lay far over as she staggered along under all of her canvas, and the cruiser also bent gracefully to the breeze, yet rushed on in hot chase, while the schooner sped along as straight as a church steeple, and was gaining on the West Indian craft rapidly.

As the sea grew lighter under the breaking day, it was observed that the vessel-of-war was not, as had been believed by both the Chevalier and his lieutenant, the cruiser of the lakes, and which was kept as a sentinel, or guard, in Borgne, Pontchartrain and the Chantelour Passes, or Sound; but, on the contrary, it proved to be a brigantine of three hundred tons, graceful as a gondola, swift as a bird, and as saucy and rakish as a pirate.

"We could disfigure yonder pretty craft, señor, if we did but try," said Alvarez Navarro, suggestively.

"And we could bring yonder lugger to with a shot, but I never fire on a vessel I know has a female on board, or upon the cruisers of my country," was the Chevalier's quiet response.

"He will not be so generous, for yonder comes another shot, and up go his colors," remarked the lieutenant, as the discharge of a bow gun was followed by the running up to the peak the stars and stripes.

But the schooner paid no attention to the command to show her flag, but continued on in chase of the lugger, which was now heading for the pass between Lakes Borgne and Pontchartrain.

The chase was now most exciting, for hardly half a mile divided the schooner from the lugger, and astern two miles came the brigantine, all set that she dared carry, and some few miles

ahead was the pass between the lakes, toward which all three vessels were rushing under clouds of snowy duck.

Gazing attentively at the cruiser for awhile, the Chevalier Corsair said, addressing his lieutenant, to whom he seemed much attached:

"Alvarez, when in the city I heard that a new vessel, a brigantine, had been built, and especially armed, officered and manned to hunt me down; her name was the Huntress, and she carried a crew of a hundred men, four twelve to a broadside, and three pivot heavy guns, forward, amidships, and aft, and was reported as a craft of marvelous speed, and that one in pursuit is the very one, and the captain I told you I deceived in New Orleans, is her commander."

"Captain Sylvester, señor?"

"Yes, Harold Sylvester, a man whom I know well, and he is as noble as he is brave; I would not aim a gun at his vessel for the world; but I had supposed he had gone up the river, and not approached the city by way of Lake Borgne."

"He has a handsome vessel, señor, and she can fly too, for she holds her own pretty well with El Maldito; and just see that lugger how she rushes along; if we were not running into a trap, as I believe we are, I could enjoy this chase immensely; but once through the pass, señor, and we are cut off from a escape."

The Chevalier Corsair smiled, but made no reply for some minutes; then he said:

"Set the topsails, Señor Navarro, for I wish to gain more time," and under her increased sail, the schooner fairly leaped ahead, and her sharp bowsprit was soon, as the night before, hovering over the stern of the lugger.

At the wheel stood Manuel Hernandez, proving himself, by the way he had handled the craft, a thorough seaman, and forward were the half-dozen men that comprised the crew; but Tolosa was nowhere visible, nor was Stella Enderos, and a frown came upon the face of the corsair chief, for he dreaded mischief.

"Ho, señor corsair, why do you change your mind and dog my wake, after having set me free?" called out Don Manuel, as he beheld the chief standing upon the bow of his vessel.

"Alvarez, go to leeward of the lugger; and stand by all, to shorten sail, for I do not wish to run by," called out the Chevalier, and his orders being obeyed, the schooner and lugger were sailing broadside to broadside, and at the same rate of speed.

Then turning to Don Manuel, the Chevalier answered:

"It is my humor, señor, to dog your wake, for I believe you have been up to some deviltry; where is the skipper?"

"In the cabin; he dropped a pistol and it exploded, wounding him in the arm."

"And the Señorita Enderos?"

"She is looking after the wounded man," was the curt reply.

"No, señor chief, she is here to answer for herself," and Stella Enderos appeared on the deck, her face pale, her manner nervous.

At sight of the maiden, Don Hernandez looked as though he intended springing upon her, and hurling her back down the companion-way; but to release his helm he knew would throw the lugger against the schooner, and perhaps sink her, and he contented himself by crying:

"Back into the cabin, Stella! there is danger for you here."

"There is no danger I dare not face, Señor Hernandez," and turning to the Chevalier, she continued:

"Señor, again I claim your protection, and frankly admit I spoke falsely to you; but it was to save this man's life, and under a pledge that he would return me to my father; now, I tell you, that I am not his wife, nor ever shall I be, for he is base and heartless, and he, after you, a sea-rover, set me free, dragged me away in this vessel, to force me to marry him, and thereby gain my fortune."

"This is a pleasant story to hear, Don Manuel Hernandez; pray proceed, lady," and there was a look in the Chevalier's eyes, as he stood on the schooner's bulwarks, looking down upon the lugger, which caused the Spaniard to tremble.

"I have only to say, señor chief, that after you permitted the lugger to go, Don Manuel showed his true nature, and boldly told me that I should marry him; but poor Señor Tolosa would permit no such wrong, and was shot down, but thank the Virgin not killed, by this double-dyed traitor, who then, by threats and bribes, forced the crew to aid him in flying from you, for he saw that the firing of the pistol had alarmed you."

The Chevalier cast a hurried look astern at the coming brigantine, which was slowly gaining, as the schooner had shortened sail; and then said, in a loud tone:

"Señor Navarro, come here!"

"Your orders, señor chief?" and the lieutenant sprung upon the bulwarks beside his commander.

"Take six of my crew and board this lugger, and put back to the Lake shore, at the place in the lagoon where the schooner lay hidden; at night go to New Orleans, and ask at the cabaret of Pierre Jacot for Don Ivan Enderos, and lead him to where his daughter is; then you can, if

he so wishes, give over the lugger and crew to his keeping, and, with your men return to the city, where you can await my coming; but under all circumstances hold Don Manuel Hernandez as your prisoner."

"Do you understand, Lieutenant Navarro?"

"In everything, señor chief."

"Then obey at once."

The corsair lieutenant sprung back upon the schooner, and in five minutes had selected his crew of six picked men, armed and equipped them, and with light bounds they were upon the lugger's deck, and Don Manuel a prisoner, and the West Indian crew in irons.

"Señorita, you can trust Alvarez Navarro as you would your brother; may your life be a happy one; farewell," and the Chevalier raised his cap, bowed, and, at a signal from him to the helmsman, the schooner swung off, the lugger went about, and the two vessels parted, and not a moment too soon, for the brigantine was now not a mile away, and coming on with a saucy look that meant mischief.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

RUN INTO A SNARE.

WHEN Alvarez Navarro headed the lugger back the way he had come, it was with a foreboding of evil at his heart that his chief was running into a danger from which he could not extricate himself, for he knew that Belmont, the Buccaneer, had the reputation of never firing upon the American flag, though he was a bitter enemy to the Spanish, French and British ensigns, and all his acts of outlawry had been against vessels of those nations, excepting the first deed, the rescue of Conrado Costello in the Sound.

"There! it is as I expected: the firing has alarmed the Lake Guard, and yonder she comes," he cried, as afar off, coming down the coast under a spread of canvas, the American cutter was seen, having just run out of some inlet indenting the shores of Lake Borgne.

"She is heading for the schooner," said Stella, who stood by the wheel.

"Yes, and with the brigantine will get her into a place from which I can see no escape, for one will guard the Pass to Pontchartrain, into which El Maldito must go now, and the other will run in and capture her, I fear."

"I trust not, for, corsair though he be, Señor Belmont does not deserve a fate so ignoble," said Stella, with anxiety.

"You are right, lady; no nobler man treads the deck of any vessel, and though he never turns a gun against the vessels of his native land, its cruisers are his most unmerciful foes; but the brigantine, I see, wants to bail me," and the young Cuban put his helm a couple of points nearer to the coming vessel.

"And what will you say?" asked the maiden, with interest.

"Oh! I'll make some good excuse, lady."

"Which he may not believe."

"True, but yonder is his game, and he will not tarry with us," and as the brigantine swept nearer, a loud, hoarse voice hailed:

"Ho the lugger!"

"Aho! the brigantine!" answered Alvarez Navarro, in his ringing tones.

"Who and what are you?" came back from the brigantine.

"A poor fisherman, sir; not big enough game for yonder pirate," cried Alvarez in response, and a half-cheer was heard on the cruiser, while the officer who hailed said quickly:

"That is a bloody pirate, then?"

"Yes, señor, it is El Maldito, the craft of Belmont, the Buccaneer."

A wild cheer now burst from the brigantine's crew, and the two vessels were too far apart for further conversation, and Stella Enderos said:

"You stood the ordeal well, señor; but was it necessary to tell him that it was the schooner of the Chevalier Corsair?"

"Oh, no, señorita; but it helped us, and can do no harm against my chief, as the cutter coming yonder well knows the rig of El Maldito, and, as they do not fire upon the schooner, it is evident that they see the trap she is in, and hope to take her alive—that is, without scarring her beautiful hull and rig."

"She is indeed a beautiful vessel," said Stella, with admiration.

"None more so, and for speed she has no equal, for she was built for a revenue cutter on the New England coast, but, drawing too much water for the inland waters, was bought by the Chevalier as a yacht, in which he intended making a cruise around the world; but, being truer to a friend than to himself, he committed an act that caused him to fly for his life, and made him an outlaw upon the seas; but, see, the schooner has entered the Pass, and the cutter and the brigantine are rapidly closing in after her—the Virgin grant the Chevalier's star of fortune set not now in gloom."

"Amen!" fervently responded Stella, and, giving the helm to one of his men, Alvarez Navarro turned his whole attention to the chase of the buccaner, while, standing by his side, the maiden also looked on with an anxiety second only to his own.

And the anxiety was not unwarranted, for

the schooner had rushed swiftly through the Pass, and was heading for the shore beyond, as though knowing escape was impossible, her captain intended by cutting her and saving himself and crew by taking to the forest.

Apparently believing this to be his design, the cutter and the brigantine, both entering the Pass together, pulled side by side, and followed in the wake of the chase, fully assured that at last the famous El Maldito's perilsome days had ended.

"Good God! he intends to beach her; I am surprised at that, for the Chevalier has a nature that would make him risk running out between the cruisers, and taking the chances of their sinking him," cried Alvarez Navarro.

"And I have been the cause of this?" said Stella, sadly.

"Oh, no; we believed that there was trouble on the lugger, so put back to see, and, as free rovers, we must take the chances," indifferently said the young officer.

"And if he beaches his vessel?"

"Then they will have to take to the forest and escape, so he may reach the city as soon as I do."

"But will lose his beautiful vessel?"

"Oh, yes; but not long will the Chevalier Corsair remain ashore, for he will soon have another craft, though El Maldito's match will be hard to find; but, see, the schooner does not strike the beach!"

"There is a lagoon there, señor," answered one of his men.

"Ah! I see now, and he is running into it; I see he has determined to stand at bay, and fight the boats off, if they attack."

"Many years ago, señor, when I was a boy, my father was a smuggler on this coast, and the lagoon the chief has run into was open, and a boat could go, by the numerous bayous, all the way to the city's edge; but it has been choked up with deposits of late years, I've heard, and the pretty craft has run into a trap, for even a large bateau cannot run up more than a mile now," said the man; who had been the one to whom Alvarez Navarro had resigned the helm.

"Well, we'll soon hear the music of combat, for I do not believe the Chevalier will allow even his own countrymen to take him without a savage fight in self-defense, and may the holy Virgin spare him."

"The same prayer is upon my lips, señor," said Stella Enderos, softly, and shortening sail upon the lugger, as the wind steadily increased, all on board waited to hear the sound of conflict, for both the cutter and the brigantine had followed the schooner into the bayou, and the tall trees had hidden even their lofty topmasts from sight.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CORSAIR'S TRUMP CARD.

Side by side the two cruisers, the one a rapid sailing cutter, which had for two years been a terror to outlaw crafts upon the lakes and among the Chandeleur Islands, and the other the brigantine, also a vessel of marked speed, entered the mouth of the lagoon or bayou, into which a quarter of an hour before the schooner had disappeared.

As they were but a short distance apart, each crew could see upon the decks of the other vessel, and an officer of middle age, who stood, trumpet in hand on the quarter-deck of the cutter, hailed the brigantine and asked:

"What brigantine-of-war is that?"

"The Huntress, ordered South on a cruise in the Gulf and Caribbean Sea for buccaneers," answered a young lieutenant, who was evidently in command, though his uniform showed the rank of a junior lieutenant.

"I am glad to meet you, sir; I am Captain Dumont, and I command this cutter, the Sleuth-hound; are you Captain Harold Sylvester, who I learned was to command the Huntress?" queried the officer of the cutter.

"No, sir, I am only the officer in charge, Captain Sylvester having gone ashore to visit the city; seeing the schooner, and suspecting her of mischief, I ran out last night from my anchorage and gave chase."

"You were right, sir; that is the famous schooner *El Maldito*, and her commander is Belmont the Buccaneer, who is also called the Chevalier Corsair; I have chased him half a hundred times, but he is at last caught in a snare, and I will be glad to have you join me in the capture of the noted pirate."

"With pleasure, Captain Dumont, and from all I have heard of the Chevalier Corsair we will both have our hands full. What depth have we in this bayou?"

"Oh, we can run up to the bend yonder, and then will have to attack in our boats," and with equal speed the two vessels, their crews at their guns, and all hopeful of soon capturing the great sea rover, stood on together, until they came to the bend referred to by Captain Dumont.

There the bayou narrowed to a creek, not two hundred feet in width, and both cruisers came to anchor, and then followed the orders:

"Man the boats!"

In a few minutes after the anchors were let fall four boats, crowded with armed men, left

each vessel, making a very formidable force with which to attack the schooner, for there were over a hundred and fifty men in them, and the two that led the way each carried a six-pound howitzer mounted in the bows.

With steady stroke the little fleet moved up the bayou, two abreast, the cutter's boats upon the starboard, the brigantine's on the left, and only the length of their oars apart, the two commanders had an opportunity to converse together as to what course the Chevalier Corsair would pursue.

"I learn that he never fires upon an American vessel," said Lieutenant Frayne, whom Harold Sylvester had left in command of the Huntress when he went to the city to see the Carnival, carrying Walter Nevil along with him, and approaching in his boat by a small bayou that led into the city's limits.

"He does not take American vessels as his game, and I have only known him to fire once upon me, though I have often had him in a hot place, and have thrown tons of iron away upon him," answered Captain Dumont.

"He did fire upon you once, then?"

"Yes; but it was when I had him in as close a place as he is in now, almost, for I had him on a lee-shore, and he had to run the gantlet of a frigate's fire to escape; but, just as we were certain he would have to fight, surrender or blow up his schooner, he suddenly lay to, and I saw the chief himself swing his long pivot twenty-four around and sight it, and I can tell you, sir, it was a dead shot, for it cut my foremast off ten feet above the deck, caused me to broach-to, and away he went again like a racer, darting in between the Chandeleurs, where I thought a keel dare not go, and thus avoiding the frigate's fire, and running out into the Gulf as coolly as though he was on a pleasure cruise."

"But you do not think he will fight now, Captain Dumont?"

"If he don't he's a fool, for he'll hang as sure as he surrenders; but he may set his schooner on fire, and take to the woods with his crew, and in that case he can escape, though he loses his craft, and she's the fastest that ever spread sail in these waters—there, now we can see for half a mile ahead of us."

"And the schooner is nowhere visible."

"No, but she must be soon, for the overflow of the swamps some years ago choked up this bayou, and fishermen say that a *piroque* even cannot pass," and Captain Dumont raised his glass to his eyes and peered searchingly ahead.

The bayou, as they went on, continued to narrow still more, and its low banks were bordered by swamp cypress trees, loaded down by festoons of gray moss, through which it was impossible to see half a dozen yards, and it was evident that some men in the boats expected an ambush, for many an anxious look was turned upon the shores, as if anticipating a line of fire burst forth, and feel the deadly bullets crashing into their midst.

At last the second bend of the bayou was reached and turned, and again the view was unobstructed for half a mile; but still no schooner appeared in sight, and Lieutenant Frayne glanced over to Captain Dumont inquiringly.

"Strange; I have not been up this lagoon for many years, but it seems to me that we should have reached the barrier the overflow made across it," said that officer.

And on the boats pulled steadily until another bend showed another bayou branching off to the right, while the one they followed led inland further.

"What does this mean? I do not recall this second lagoon," said the surprised captain of the cutter, and the little fleet of eight boats came to a stand-still, the men resting upon their oars.

"What is to be done, sir?" asked Lieutenant Frayne, not knowing what to suggest.

"I do not remember this bayou, sir, but my memory may be treacherous, as it was so long ago since I was here; but let us divide forces, you going to the left, I to the right, and a shot from our howitzer will be a signal for us to come to the other's aid, if we discover the schooner," said the captain.

"Ay, ay, sir; give way, men!" and the brigantine's boats kept away to the left, while the cutter's held on to the right, and soon they were lost to sight of each other.

For a mile Lieutenant Frayne held on, and then came to a stand-still, for fallen trees barred his further passage, and it was evident the schooner had not gone that way.

"Put about, all! We'll join the cutter's boats, and pull with a will!" said the disappointed officer; but, as he spoke there echoed through the gloomy forest the deep boom of a heavy gun, causing many a sleepy alligator to plunge from the banks into the water, and water-birds to fly shrieking through the woods.

"Pull hard, all! that's the signal, and Captain Dumont has found the corsair," shouted the lieutenant, and, as another deep boom was heard, and then another, the crews of the boats gave a wild cheer and sent them flying through the water.

Reaching the spot where the bayou flowed

into the larger one, and where they had parted with the cutter's men, they turned rapidly into the lagoon that led away to the right; but suddenly coming toward them was an eight-oared barge, with no crew but its oarsmen, and a midshipman in the stern.

Before he came in hailing distance he waved his hands for them to stop, and coming nearer, shouted:

"Back! back to the brigantine and get under way, for the bayou is no longer choked up, and the corsair has gained open water."

"And Captain Dumont?" called out Lieutenant Frayne.

"Is pulling with all haste along the shore back to the mouth of the inlet; he lightened my boat of its crew and sent me back to tell you, besides firing the howitzer."

"Back water; about all! pull for your lives, men," shouted Lieutenant Frayne, and the cutter's boat dashing up, all five rowed back down the bayou, the oarsmen bending to their oars with a will that caused the blades to bend like a bow.

"And the pirate has escaped?" asked Lieutenant Frayne, in a disappointed tone, as the midshipman's barge rowed abreast of him.

"It looks so, sir; we got out of the inlet to see him standing leisurely away under easy sail, and about a mile distant, and, in firing the signals to you, we sent a shot after him; but he took no notice of it whatever."

"Then he towed through the bayous, with his boats out ahead?"

"Yes, sir; he knew, what we did not, that the bayou was no longer choked up, and in running in here was playing a trump card against us, and which we had no idea he held," replied the young midshipman, who doubtless passed his leisure aboard ship in the steerage over a game of cards.

"It is too bad indeed; but with two such fleet vessels as the cutter and brigantine in his wake, he may yet be taken; pull, lads, pull with a will!"

"I doubt it, sir, though I hope so, as I have a special curiosity to see the Chevalier Corsair; but, fast as your brigantine is, sir, I noticed the schooner held her own this morning, and had not all her canvas set."

"True; but there are the vessels," and raising his voice until it rung like a trumpet, Lieutenant Frayne shouted:

"Ho! the Huntress! Ho! the cutter! up with your anchors! set all sail! lively, lads, lively!"

Aware that something of a startling nature had occurred, the officers left in charge of the two vessels obeyed with alacrity, and the cutter and the brigantine swung clear by the time the boats were alongside.

To hoist them to their davits, and get under way, with all canvas set, was short work, and out of the inlet dashed the fleet sea-warriors hot on the track of the daring corsair.

When clear of the shores they met the boats of the cutter, and Captain Dumont was livid with rage as he boarded his vessel, and in spite of the gale that was blowing, ordered more sail set, for just a league away, dashing toward the pass between the lakes, was the saucy pirate schooner, with nothing to bar her flight to the open waters of the Gulf.

And away across the low point of land, creeping toward her hiding-place, could be seen the tops of the lugger's lateen sails, while upon her decks, Alvarez Navarro and his men were rejoicing over the escape of their daring chief, for they could see that El Maldito was showing a clean pair of heels to her disappointed pursuers.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A CORSAIR'S MUSINGS.

"WHERE will you head, señor chief?"

The speaker was the officer next in rank aboard El Maldito, to Alvarez Navarro, and almost a giant in form, but with a face that was full of courage, and not devoid of kindness.

"To the Balize, Mr. Morgan, and I trust, we be not too late," was the reply of the Chevalier Corsair, as he turned his gaze astern upon the cutter and brigantine a league and a half away, but pressing on swiftly in pursuit.

"Is it a treasure-ship from Spain, or Portugal, making the port of Orleans you wish to head off, sir?" asked Morgan, the lieutenant, yet in a polite tone, that showed interest instead of inquisitiveness.

"No, it is a West Indian *caravel*: once the private yacht of Don Ivan Enderos, whose *hacienda* we raided some time since; she sailed from New Orleans early last evening, and was boldly cut out by my old friend, but now my bitterest foe, Conrado Costello, who has determined to raise the black flag, and be guilty of a crime which I have sworn he shall not accomplish; don't spare canvas, Mr. Morgan, for we must head the *caravel* off at the Balize, or else we may have to follow her to Boston harbor, and a stern chase will be a long one with her, for we sailed out of St. Jago with her once and El Maldito nearly found her match."

"I remember her now, señor; but El Maldito had on her honest sails then as a coaster; but with her dishonest canvas set, as she has now, there's no keel been laid ever driven through

the water as she lost; but I feared for her to-day, as I did not know how you were to get out of the bayou, having heard it was choked up."

"And so it was; but a freshet, such as choked it up years ago, broke the barrier a year or so ago, and I was aware of that, and expected to elude our pursuers as we did; as the Señor Navarro is away, we will have to do double duty, Morgan, so call me if I am needed," and, with another glance at his pursuers, and then at the Chandeleur Islands, through which the schooner was passing, the Chevalier Corsair descended to his cabin and threw himself into an easy-chair.

And over his face crept a look of inexpressible sadness, while he said, as was his wont when alone, half aloud:

"How long must this life continue, I wonder?"

"In the mad excitement of the chase and desperate danger, I am content, for it chimes in with my humor; but now, when I am alone with the grim specters that rise from the past to haunt me, then it is memory will not vanish at my bidding, and I see my once happy home in far-away Boston, my dear old father, whom I still love, in spite of the bitter curse he drove me from his door with, and my darling sister, who threw aside the love of noble Harold Sylvester, for that of Conrado Costello, who would now drag her down to ruin as his wife.

"But, he shall not, for I have sworn to track him to the ends of the earth, ere he shall bring one sorrow upon her innocent life, for God knows, I have brought disgrace and wretchedness upon all of my name.

"And poor, poor Marion! is it, I wonder, that because my hand placed a grave between us, that her image no longer holds its impress upon my heart as in the olden time?"

"And yet it does not, for before me each moment rises the sweet face of that beautiful girl whom I found a prisoner in the ruined convent, and whither Conrado Costello's baseness had caused her to be taken.

"Manine Valverdel a sweet name, indeed, and one I love to speak; but what have I to do with her? I, an outlaw, branded with the name of pirate, have no right even to turn my eyes upon her; yet, for her sweet sake, nevertheless, I would be willing to forever sink the guilty past, and, as another being, wholly devote my life to her; but could she love one whose hand, stretched out to her in pleading, was stained with blood?"

"Ah, me, I fear not; I fear the love of the pure is forever shut out of my life."

Rising impatiently, with hands clasped behind him, he paced to and fro in the cabin, his brow contracted with a scowl, his lips sternly set; then again throwing himself into his chair, he said:

"By Heaven! I will do it; I will hunt down Conrado Costello, and bring Manuel Hernandez to the yard-arm, and then cast off forever the yoke of guilt I wear, and strive to win a name honorable among men, for they will not then know me as Belmont, the Buccaneer, and the Chevalier Corsair."

And again he sprang to his feet, and then, while a derisive laugh broke from his lips, said, bitterly:

"Bah! what have I to do with honor? What hope have I for the future? What but regret in the past?"

"I am what I am, and with the brand of piracy upon my brow, I dare not raise my head among honorable people; no, no; a life of mad excitement must be mine, and a death upon an outlaw deck will be my fate," and, as though unwilling to trust himself longer alone, he ascended to the deck once more. Yet, as soon as he faced his crew every trace of the bitterness in his heart vanished from his features like magic, and once again he was the defiant, haughty Belmont, the Buccaneer.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CARAVEL SIGHTED.

WHEN the schooner, the day after its escape from the cutter and brigantine, sighted the Pass à Loutre, at the Delta of the Mississippi, there was no doubt but that the cruisers had given up the chase, having lost the buccaneer craft in the darkness, for they were nowhere visible.

Nor was the *caravel* to be seen, unless a tiny object far off on the horizon, and no larger than a sea-gull's wing was her.

Inshore, lying off the East Pass, a sail was visible; but it was at once discovered to be a pilot craft, waiting for some incoming merchantman going up to the city.

As the Gulf rovers never interfered with the pilots, and in fact had some of them in their pay as spies, there was no need of the little craft taking flight at sight of the schooner, although her rakish appearance at once gave an idea of her lawless career, and the corsair having signaled for the skipper to stand out and meet him, he promptly obeyed, and soon boarded the buccaneer.

"I am in search of a West Indian *caravel* that is due coming out about this time," said the Chevalier, as the weather-beaten pilot approached where he stood on the quarter-deck.

"She has gone out, señor; a three-master, lateen sails, armed and manned, and as swift as the wind."

"That is the craft; and she has gone to sea?"

"There, do you see yonder speck upon the horizon?"

"Yes."

"That is the craft you seek; she hailed a coaster, bound up, put three passengers on board, and then ran off as though she had been in some mischief, and I guess she has, as I see this cruiser in pursuit, and which I took for a pirate at first."

"And you have changed your mind?" asked the Chevalier, with a smile.

"Partly, on seeing you, captain, for you don't look like a bloody pirate; but then you haven't got your colors at the peak."

"I sail under no colors, my man; but here is a reward for your information," and the Chevalier placed a handful of gold in the rough palm of the pilot, who said, reflectively:

"I guess I've overhauled you now, captain, for honest cruisers don't pay so liberally for nothing, and from all I've heard, I'm of opinion you is the dashing fellow they calls the Chevalier Corsair."

"It matters not who I am, my man, yonder *caravel* is my game."

"You're a gentleman, sir, pirate or priest though you may be, and I thank you for your gold, which is good metal, even if it bears blood-stains; but good-by to you, sir, and may you catch the *caravel* is all the harm I wish you," and the old pilot went over the side into his boat, while the schooner darted away in the wake of the distant sail with a speed that brought a shout of admiration from the crew and skipper of the little pilot sloop.

"Mr. Morgan, let the beauty show what she can do now, for yonder craft must be run down, and she has a long start," and entering his cabin the Chevalier threw himself upon a velvet divan, and was soon sleeping as peacefully as a child.

After several hours he was awakened by the pitching of the schooner, and going on deck he discovered that the wind was blowing a gale from the south, and that the vessel was driving along under more canvas than it was prudent to carry.

"Her masts are bowed, señor chief; but I did not reduce sail much, as the *caravel* seemed to be holding her own pretty well, considering the craft that is in her wake," said Lieutenant Morgan, as his chief joined him.

"You are right; we have only raised half her sails above the horizon; but I can see by those that it is the *caravel*; but take in the topsails, Morgan, for her canvas staggers her, and she can still creep up a little on the chase."

"It looks as though it was going to be an ugly night, señor," and the junior officer cast a look around at the gathering clouds.

"Yes, it will come on to blow hard, doubtless; but if it is a tornado we must not lose the *caravel*; she is heading south-east by east now, and, just as I thought intends rounding Florida and heading up the coast; but," and he spoke rather to himself than to the officer, "there's many a long, weary mile between you, Conrado Costello, and the one you seek, and an avenging brother is in your wake," and he turned his gaze over the rough waters, which were now lashed into foam by the increasing wind, while the clouds shut out the light of the sun, and there was every indication that a tornado would soon be sweeping over the sea; but reeling, staggering and bounding under her huge amount of canvas the stanch schooner held on unswervingly in the wake of the vessel which the Chevalier Corsair had sworn to follow to the bitter end; but the winds and waves, which the daring corsair had defied so long, seemed to have conspired against him, for the hurricane broke with fearful force, the darkness shut down upon the sea, and to save his vessel the chief had to run before the gale, which was driving in the very direction from whence he had come—back to the shores washed by the waters of Lake Borgne and Chandeleur Sound.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE CUBAN CORSAIR'S STORY.

WHEN Alvarez Navarro discovered, from the deck of the lugger, that the schooner had in some way cleverly eluded the two cruisers, and came dashing out of the Pass apparently unhurt, he could not restrain the burst of joy that arose to his lips, and in which his crew of six men heartily joined.

Alarmed by the wild cry of the buccaneers, Stella Enderos came quickly on deck, followed by her quadroon maid, Ninetta, who, since her mistress had been in the power of Don Manuel Hernandez, had remained closely in the cabin of the lugger, weeping and bewailing her fate.

"Pardon, lady, for alarming you; but see, yonder, El Maldito has escaped, and, as usual, the chief has laughed his pursuers to scorn."

A cry of joy came to Stella's lips also, when the young officer pointed to the flying schooner, and she turned to the quadroon:

"Ninetta, dry your eyes now, for you have been bemoaning the fate of the handsome Chevalier Corsair ever since I told you that we had nothing more to fear; see, he has escaped."

"He deserves it, lady mistress, for he is a good man, and I prayed hard for him," answered the quadroon.

"How is the lugger's master, lady?" asked Alvarez Navarro of the maiden, who had devotedly attended him since he had been shot down by Don Manuel.

"Oh, he is much better, and one of his own men has extracted the ball, so I think he will be all right before long; is it there that you intend to land, señor?" and the maiden pointed to a distant wooded point of land.

"Oh no, señorita; I dare not run in before nightfall, as our hiding-place must be kept secret; but, I promise you, if your father is still in the city you shall be under his protection before two days."

"I thank you, Señor Navarro, and he will thank you, too; but oh, señor, why is it that one like you, a man of refinement and education, can be what you are, a pirate?"

Ninetta had returned to the cabin, the buccaneer crew had gone forward once more, and were watching the flying schooner, and her two pursuers far astern, and with the impulsiveness of her nature the maiden had approached and laid her hand upon the arm of the young pirate officer, as he stood by the helm, which he firmly grasped.

At her question he started and his dark face paled; but he turned his fine eyes full upon her and said slowly, and in the low tones that seemed habitual to him:

"Would you know why, Señorita Enderos, I am an outlaw instead of an honorable man, I will tell you, for you have asked the question in kindness, I feel."

"Indeed I have, and your nature proves to me there are palliating circumstances that you are what you are."

"You shall be the judge, lady, and, remember, that for the acts of my past life I offer no excuse, for, if I have sinned so I must suffer; if I have raised my hand against my fellow-men, so must their hands be raised against me."

He paused, and the maiden said, softly:

"I will listen to all you have to say, and if word of mine can give encouragement or comfort, it shall not be withheld."

"I feel it, and I thank you," he said, and his voice trembled slightly; but, controlling the emotion he felt, he continued:

"I am, as you doubtless know, a Cuban, and there is no better family in the island than mine, I think I can say without vanity; but then the very high position my father occupied among the people made him a marked man, and because he would not brook an insult from one of the Spanish rulers, and, in a duel killed him, he was arrested and thrown into Moro Castle, his wealth, in a great measure, confiscated, and for long years he was kept in a loathsome dungeon as a felon.

"At last public opinion forced the Governor-General to pardon him, and he returned to his half-ruined home, just as an insurrection was on foot to wrest the Gem of the Antilles from Spain.

"What he might have done I do not know, though I think he would have joined the insurgents; but ere he had time to decide, even, he was arrested as a rebel against the crown, tried, found guilty by false charges, and garoted within three days.

"His death, in such a violent way, killed my poor mother, and my aunt, my mother's only sister, and myself were all who dared follow her to the grave, so bitter was Spanish hatred against the family of Navarro, the insurgent—But, why do you start, señorita?"

"I am listening, señor, and deeply interested," was the quiet reply, though it was evident that something the Cuban had said had deeply moved her.

"Even the slaves, the few left us, dare not go to the grave of a dead Navarro, and my aunt, and myself, then a mere boy, buried her secretly by night.

"Some days after, broken in fortune, my young and beautiful aunt accepted a position as governess to a young American lady, and sent me to college in the United States, and it was there I met first the Chevalier Corsair, and knew his noble nature as it was; but, from the day I touched American soil I have never heard from my aunt, and I fear that, in some way, she was killed by Spanish treachery, for she was intensely bitter against all the Cuban rulers.

"Leaving college, I returned to Cuba, and forgetting not what my father and my family had suffered, I was very revengeful, and was easily led to join a band of Patriots, who intended to strike for the freedom of the isle; but, alas! they were faint-hearted, one of them sold out both parties for gold, and though he escaped with his life, many of those he betrayed were put to death, and I, among the number, was sentenced to die by the *garote*, but first to be branded upon the forehead and in the hand with red-hot iron, which was to burn into my flesh the word traitor.

"Do you see this scar, señorita? It is plain enough, and you can easily see the word—*trait*—for," and he held out his left hand, in the palm of which had been burned the letters, clear and distinct.

"From the hand it was to be placed on my forehead; but maddened with rage, revenge and agony, I seized the iron, struck down my torturer, cleaved my way through the guard, and, strange to say, escaped by springing upon an officer's horse.

"Putting to sea in an open boat I was picked up days after, more dead than alive, by the Chevalier Corsair, in whom I recognized my old college friend, to whom I told my wrongs.

"Now, Señorita Enderos, you know why I am what I am, for I have no land to claim as my own, no flag to protect me; only my own good right arm, to carve out upon the broad blue seas my destiny."

The bright tears stood in the eyes of Stella Enderos, as Alvarez Navarro ceased speaking, and grasping his scarred hand she said, warmly:

"You have indeed suffered, and my heart's sympathy is yours; but answer me, you are the son of the Cuban known as Navarro, the Insurgent?"

"I am, lady."

"And the name of the aunt you spoke of was—"

"Jofina Juarez, señorita."

"Señor, let me tell you that the same blood flows in your veins as in mine, for the aunt you speak of was my mother."

To depict the astonishment of the young Cuban would be impossible; but when he heard how Jofina Juarez, his young and lovely aunt, had been shipwrecked, and her life saved by a being whom all shunned, but whom she had spoken kindly to, and soon after had become his wife, he knew then that Stella Enderos was indeed his cousin, and the bond of friendship already welded firmly between the two became as strong as steel, and death alone could sever the links.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A PLOT TO KILL.

PIERRE JACOT was in his tap-room, reading the daily paper with one eye, and with the other attentively watching a sleepy waitress burnishing up the bottles and bar.

It was just before midnight, and it was Monsieur Jacot's time to snatch an hour's rest, and the comfort of his paper, while he sipped a glass of claret, for business was always slack with him between the hours of ten and twelve; but from the time the clock in the cathedral tolled the time of the night, until two, it was generally a busy day in the *cabaret*, for the frequenters of the wine-room were none of them early risers.

To all appearances Monsieur Jacot and the sleepy waiters were all that the room contained; but in an alcove, curtained off, sat another person, whose existence seemed to have been forgotten by the *cabaret*-keeper.

Suddenly the door swung open and in came a man in sailor garb, and with a face concealed by a heavy beard.

"You sent for me, Monsieur Jacot," said the stranger, quietly, seating himself near the landlord.

"No, monsieur."

"I am Pierre Louis."

"Ah! then I *did* send for you, but how should I know you with all that hair on your face? I have a job for you, Monsieur Pierre."

"Will it pay?" was the laconic response.

"Yes, there is plenty of gold in it—say five hundred *onzas*."

"Ah! it is then the letting of blood, Monsieur Jacot?"

"It is; will you do it?"

"My knife is a little dull from disuse, monsieur; but the price is a large one, and I might consider it, when I know who holds the gold, and who the victim is."

"I hold the gold, Monsieur Pierre Louis, and the victim is one of my boarders, and one whom I do not think you ever met, but whom once to meet is to remember always."

"Ah! his name?"

"He is a Spaniard, and answers to the name of Don Ivan Enderos."

"There is a wealthy Spanish-American gentleman of that name, who dwells—"

"No, no, Pierre; his name is Don Henrico Enderos, and he is a prince among men, while this one is a Hunchback, and as hideous as the mask of Satan, while he is a very devil when roused, I warn you beforehand, so you may be prepared."

"Bah! I care little for devils, monsieur, for I never met my match in strength but once; but you want this Hunchback killed, you say?"

"Oh, no, Monsieur Louis, I do not want him killed; but another person desires him out of the way, and where could a better place be found than the grave? especially as by his death you can make five hundred *onzas*."

"It is a large sum for you to pay, and—"

"You are wrong again, my dear friend; I do not give it; only am the banker for it, to hand it to you when your work is done; the one who

gives the money called on me to-day and asked me to arrange the little matter for him, and, knowing you were in hard luck, and had a little account on my books, I sent for you, thinking you might wish to turn an honest penny."

"Very well, give me two hundred and fifty *onzas* now, and the balance when the work is done, and we'll call it square."

"And when will it be done?"

"To-morrow! to-night! now!"

"Very well, now is the best time, for I will let you into his room, and show you a means of escape; he is out at present, but you can conceal yourself and await his coming home, and then," and Monsieur Jacot made a very suggestive motion, by drawing his finger across his fat throat.

"Yes, and then; now give me the gold and show me the room."

"You have a knife?"

"I am no fool, Jacot; lead the way."

Pierre Jacot called out to the girl to keep her eyes open for customers, and led the way to the tap-room.

But hardly had they disappeared when the stranger in the alcove, and whom the *cabaret*-keeper had wholly forgotten, came out into the tap-room, paid his score to the waitress, who was still half asleep, and went out into the street, a quiet smile upon his face.

And, as he passed out others came in, and then a stream of humanity set toward the *cabaret*, and upon his return down-stairs, Pierre Jacot found his patrons busy, playing dominoes and drinking claret, *noyau* and absinthe by the bottleful, as was their nightly custom.

And, out on the *pave* stood the form of the man who had left the alcove, and though as silent as a statue, his eyes scanned every one closely who entered the *cabaret*, and a look of disappointment, as shown by the swinging lamp across the street, came over his face, as scores passed in and the one he sought came not.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE WARNING.

"SEÑOR, I would speak with you."

The person addressed started, half threw back the folds of the heavy cloak he wore, and looked the one who addressed him straight in the face, while he said tersely:

"Well, sir, speak!"

"You are Don Ivan Enderos, I believe?"

"One once seeing me, or hearing me described, sir, would never fail in recognizing at sight Don Ivan Enderos, señor," was the bitter reply.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, señor, for I came to New Orleans to see you alone."

"Ah! and have we met before?"

"Never, to my knowledge."

"Had we done so, you could never forget my deformity; so I take it we have never met until to-night; how can I serve you, sir?"

"It is the other way, señor; I have come to serve you."

"As you please; it is a matter of indifference to me."

"But not to me, as I can prove; but first let me tell you that this very night I listened to a plot to assassinate you."

"Oh, I am used to plots of that kind; but of course I am willing to repay you for—"

"Don Ivan Enderos, I pardon you for the insult because you know not who I am; but I tell you I saw a man paid two hundred and fifty *onzas*, not half an hour ago, to take your life, with the promise of a like amount when he did his work, and that man is now near you, and ready for the deed."

"Yourself, perhaps; well, earn your money, señor."

"Again you insult me, señor; but I forbear for the same reason as I said before; come, lead the way to your room, I will await an instant and follow you, so as not to attract the attention of the *cabaret*-keeper; do not enter your chamber until I join you, and then see if I have not told you the truth."

"Señor, your words impress me with their truth; pardon my suspicion, and I will do as you wish," and Don Ivan entered the *cabaret*, dashed off a glass of wine at the bar, and passed on into the hallway.

A moment after the stranger entered, and taking a seat near the corridor door, watched his chance and followed the Hunchback.

"I am here, señor; now enter your room, and I will be near you."

Unhesitatingly Don Ivan obeyed, and a moment after he called out:

"Come in, señor."

The stranger obeyed, and saw only Don Ivan; but he held in his hand a note, while he said, with a smile:

"Your assassin's heart failed him, and he has left me this note, which I will read aloud."

It was in a large, bold hand, in Spanish, and simply headed with the hour at which it was written, and was as follows:

"DON IVAN ENDEROS:

"Señor: To-night the sum of two hundred and fifty *onzas* were given to me, to take your life, with the promise of as many more when you were dead."

"Pierre Jacot engaged me for the work, he being

the tool of some one else, whom you doubtless can recall far better than I.

"But Monsieur Jacot has mistaken his man, for though I have led no saintly life, I am not at heart bad, nor so base as to *assassinate* even my worst enemy; yet, as Monsieur Jacot once robbed my widowed mother, now in her grave, of just two hundred and fifty *onzas*, I have taken from him that amount, for it will aid me in leaving the city, and carrying with me the woman I love to some other spot where I can build up a home and an honest name for myself.

"Should you need confirmation of what I write, seek Mademoiselle Louissette, Cabaret Soto, and she will tell you where to find
PIERRE LOUIS."

"Well, señor, I thank you, and also Monsieur Pierre Louis, who *might* have taken me unaware, hidden as he was in my room; to you I offer my hand in friendship."

"Which I willingly grasp, señor, for I am Alvarez Navarro, the son of Navarro, the Cuban Insurgent."

"Ha! say you so? Then indeed I welcome you, señor, though 'tis said thou hast linked thy proud father's name with that of pirate."

"Alas! señor, it is but too true that I bear the brand of infamy; but judge not until you have heard all," said the young Cuban, sadly.

"I judge the *acts* of no man; it is his *heart* I would see; but you have had that heaped upon you that would turn to iron the softest heart, for I have known of thy sorrows, boy."

"Señor, I thank you, and for the kind words you have spoken to me, the outcast of my name, I will bring glad tidings to your heart, for I am sent by the Chevalier Corsair to tell you of thy daughter."

The Hunchback bounded to his feet, and seizing the Cuban by his shoulders, said in earnest, trembling tones:

"Boy, tell me of my child, my beautiful Stella, and I'll love thee as if thou wert my own son."

"She is even now not far away, and well, and—"

"And in honor?"

The Hunchback's voice was deep and thrilling as he asked the question.

"Ay, she is as pure as an angel!"

"God, I thank Thee!"

The huge head bowed for a moment, and was then raised, the face having become calm once more.

"Boy, that is the first prayer I have uttered since I was a little boy, and then I prayed for death; but the grim monster shunned me, as though he thought that he himself would die, to come in contact with such as I am."

"Señor, you are too bitter; too severe against yourself," said Alvarez, feelingly.

"Ha! ha! ha! boy, you know not my bitterness; I have two hearts, one of flesh and blood for those I love, and those who look not on me with dread and ridicule, and one of iron, of stone, of marble, for those I hate; but tell me of my child, and tell me all, Alvarez, nephew of my sainted wife, my dead Jofina."

In a few words Alvarez Navarro told his story, of the raid upon the *hacienda*, which was plotted by Manuel Hernandez, and of the carrying off of Stella and her maid, and their release by the Chevalier Corsair, and then the devilry of her cousin in trying to force her into a marriage with him, but how the buccaneer chief thwarted his wicked plans.

"And you now have Manuel Hernandez in your power?" asked the Hunchback, in hoarse tones.

"Yes, señor; I left him on board the lugger to-night."

"Alvarez, Don Manuel Hernandez belongs to your mother's branch of the family, who remained in Spain; titled, but poor, I got for him a commission in the army, and his gallantry won him promotion; but he was born a villain, and he will die a villain, and oh! what a death shall he not die."

"No, señor, not at your hands, for he is the prisoner of the Chevalier Corsair," said Alvarez, firmly.

"And will he kill him?"

"Of that there is no doubt."

"Then I *must* see him die, for, look at me! behold my deformed body, my hideous face, and say if I, shunned of all men, wretched and a very devil, do not deserve one glimpse of heaven, for it will be joy ecstatic to see that man die; but come, let us go at once to my daughter, for, monstrosity that I am, I love my child; so come, Alvarez, my son, and take me to her that sunlight may penetrate the darkness in my heart."

"Willingly will I guide you thither, señor," and the two men left the room together.

"A bottle of wine together we'll take, boy; and you, Monsieur Pierre Jacot, serve it."

The landlord started as he heard his name in the well-known tones of the man he believed then lying dead in his room, and his face turned pale, while with trembling hands he served a bottle of his best wine, placing it upon the table at which the Hunchback and the Cuban had taken seats.

"Monsieur Jacot, let me give you a little advice: never hire an assassin until you are convinced he has no heart."

"Ah! why, monsieur—you are—you mean—" stammered Jacot, and Don Ivan interrupted:

"I mean, monsieur, that Pierre Jacot merely took back the money you stole from his mother years ago, and departed; but do not feel bad about it, monsieur, for I like your hotel; its cuisine is excellent, the beds are soft, the wine good, and I have no dread of an assassin lurking beneath thy hospitable roof; good-night, my dear Jacot, and if I return not for a day, feel no alarm regarding me," and the Hunchback dashed off his wine, and, followed by the young corsair, left the cabaret.

CHAPTER XL. IN THE LION'S DEN.

At the time of which I write there were bayous, or lagoons, that found their way up to the very city of New Orleans, not only from the lakes, but also through the swamps bordering the banks of the Mississippi, and so connecting with each other that a boat could go all the way to the Gulf.

It was by one of these bayous that Alvarez Navarro had made his way in a small *piroque*, that was kept concealed at the rendezvous, or secret anchorage of the schooner, and by the same route he returned with Don Juan, the latter seated motionless in the bow of the frail canoe, and the young Cuban using the paddle that urged them swiftly along the dark stream, whose windings were followed only by keeping the eyes upon the open streak, where the skies were visible between the tree-tops.

"Here, señor; we are at the lugger; and just in time, for yonder comes the daylight," said the young Cuban, pointing at the brightening eastern sky, and skillfully guiding his *piroque* in under the festoons of moss and laying it alongside of the lugger, which lay quietly at anchor in this natural arbor, which formed such a secluded retreat even for the large schooner.

As Don Ivan sprung on deck, a slender form glided from the cabin and he felt the arms of his daughter around him; but the joy of that meeting between the Hunchback and the link that held him to life, it would be sacrilege to break the sacredness of by portrayal, and the two, the hideous man and the beautiful woman, I will leave alone in the delight of their reunion, and tell of the surprise that awaited Alvarez Navarro upon his return.

"Well, Jacinto, all has gone well, I see?" he said, in a tone of inquiry, addressing the man whom he had left in charge of the lugger, and who made no reply, but simply pointed out through the mossy curtain.

The young Cuban started, for at anchor, not two cable-lengths further in the inlet, lay a vessel, dark and ominous-looking.

"It looks like the brigantine," he whispered.

"It is the brigantine, señor; she came in the inlet shortly after you left and dropped anchor there; but, whether they know of this retreat, is hard to tell."

"I think not, but only came in for an anchorage; but we must be as silent as death on the lugger, for it would be impossible to get out of here, now, though to-night we may do so; keep Don Manuel Hernandez gagged, Jacinto, for if he knew of her presence near, he would assuredly cry out for aid and betray us."

"He is with the lugger's men, señor, in the steerage, and they shall know nothing of the brigantine's presence; but, I fear the schooner may run in, and be caught in a trap."

"There is danger of it, for the chief will hardly suspect that a vessel-of-war has sought anchorage in this little inlet, and he would doubtless return here as soon as he saw the brigantine and cutter give up the chase," and, glancing more searchingly upon the vessel, as the light of day increased, he continued:

"It is the brigantine, I see, now, as the tide sweeps her round, and a beauty she is, too, and heavier in hull, metal and men, than *El Maldito*; still, if the chief would fight her, he would be victorious, for he handles the schooner in action as a good dancer does a belle in a ball-room," said the young lieutenant, with enthusiasm.

And all through the day there was a silence like death on the lugger, for the seamen walked the deck with shoeless feet, and conversed in whispers, Don Manuel and the lugger's crew, except the wounded Tolosa, who had proven himself the champion of Stella Enderos, were gagged and kept in the closed steerage, and even in the cabin, Don Ivan, his daughter, and Alvarez Navarro conversed in hushed tones, until, as evening approached, it was a relief to see the skies darkening with storm-clouds, hear the muttering thunder, and the howling of the winds.

During the day spent in the cabin, Don Ivan Enderos had decided to dispose of his home in the West Indies, and transfer his residence to New Orleans, a decision that greatly pleased his daughter, and also Alvarez Navarro, who had, in fact, urged it.

"To-night I can send you, señor, my sweet cousin and her maid, to the city in the lugger's yawl, which will also carry the kegs of treasure, and you can go at once to the cabaret of Jacot, until you secure a home for yourself."

"And you, cousin Alvarez?" asked Stella, with considerable interest.

"I will remain with the lugger until the return of the schooner, and then Señor Tolosa can return with his vessel to the West Indies."

"And you will go back on the schooner, cousin Alvarez?" again asked the maiden.

"My duty calls me there, sweet cousin; it is my only home, at least for the present," he added.

And thus it was decided; and aided by the storm, on account of the near presence of the brigantine, rather than retarded, the yawl left the lugger's side shortly after dark, with the Don, Stella, and the Quadroon maid, and all the treasure the Hunchback had been robbed of, excepting a few jewels already disposed of by Manuel Hernandez.

Before leaving the vessel, however, Don Ivan had entered the steerage and gazed upon the man who had been so treacherous to him; but, as though afraid to trust himself in his presence, he turned quickly and sprang into the waiting boat, uttering no word to his wicked kinsman, who, bound and gagged, quailed beneath his burning gaze.

Not daring to leave the lugger, for fear the schooner might arrive, Alvarez Navarro ordered Jacinto to go in charge of the boat, with instructions to take Don Ivan and his treasure in safety to the cabaret of Pierre Jacot, and return with all speed to the vessel, and, all being in readiness, he held out his hand to the maiden, saying, sadly:

"Farewell, cousin mine; with your going the sunlight leaves my heart."

"It need not, Alvarez, for you have it to make, or mar your future life; farewell, and may the Virgin protect you in your wanderings will ever be my prayer."

He landed her into the boat, and grasped the outstretched hand of Don Ivan.

"Alvarez, my son, come to us when you can, and, when you choose to wipe from your brow the brand of pirate, my home shall be thy home; but remember," and his voice became deep and earnest, "I have left Manuel Hernandez in your hands, and when next we meet, I would listen with rapture to the sweet story, to my waiting ears, of his death."

"The Chevalier Corsair will not permit him to escape the punishment he so richly deserves; farewell!"

"Give way!" said Jacinto, in a low tone, and with muffled oars the yawl left the lugger's side, and crept slowly along close inshore, the darkness and storm hiding her from the view of the watchful eyes on board the *Huntress*.

Without adventure Jacinto, who knew every bayou and inlet in the vicinity of New Orleans, guided his passengers to the city, and delivered them and their treasure safely into the hands of Pierre Jacot, who turned pale at sight of Don Ivan, and seemed most anxious to do all in his power to make him forget that he had plotted his assassination.

With a handsome recompense from the Don, Jacinto and his four comrades returned to their yawl, and were just preparing to shove off, having buttoned their storm-jackets closely around them to shelter them from the pelting storm, when two persons approached, enveloped in cloaks, and wearing caps.

That they were naval officers, the rays of a lamp which the wind kept dancing about on its swinging chain, revealed distinctly, and the buccaneers dropped their hands upon their weapons, believing they had been surprised; but the first words of the larger of the two strangers reassured them.

"Ah! here is a boat, Walter, that we can doubtless charter," and approaching the bank of the canal, or bayou, he continued aloud:

"My men, do you wish to earn an *onza* apiece?"

"Gold is always acceptable, sir," answered Jacinto, politely.

"Well said, my man, and here is a purse to divide among you if you will row us to the lake."

"It is a bad night, captain, to be on the water; but if you are from the brigantine we will take you."

"Ah! you recognize us then? Yes, I am Captain Sylvester, her commander, and you, by the way, look like men-of-war's men."

"We are, sir; we are from the cutter, which joined you in the chase of the schooner of Belmont, the *Buccaneer*, day before yesterday."

"Then the cutter has returned?" asked the younger officer, who was Walter Nevil.

"Yes, sir; she is anchored in the inlet a mile above where the brigantine lies; we just carried Captain Dumont to the city," responded Jacinto, with ready lie, for, being acquainted with the names of the cutter's officers, and having witnessed the chase of the corsair, he had the advantage of Harold Sylvester and the midshipman, especially as himself and comrades were in seamen's garb.

"Then of course he did not capture the pirate? Now, my man, you can give way as soon as you are ready," and Captain Sylvester and Walter Nevil settled themselves as comfortably as possible in the stern-sheets.

"Give way, lads!" ordered Jacinto, and the yawl moved out into the bayou and headed for the lake, while the two American officers, little dreaming in whose power they had placed

themselves, went on talking about the Chevalier Corsair and the attempt to capture him.

"I regret exceedingly, Walter, that I was not on board the *Huntress*; but Frayne no doubt did all that he could to capture the corsair."

"There is no doubt of it, sir, from what I have heard, for you know I was not in the chase, as, having sent the boat back as you ordered, and going out to the lake on horseback the next morning I arrived after the *Huntress* had left."

"And the corsair cleverly eluded both the brigantine and the cutter?"

"Yes, sir, and when the *Huntress* ran in the inlet last night and dropped anchor, and I got the keeper of the lake-shore cabaret, where I was stopping, to row me out to her, I never in my life saw such a dejected set of men, from Lieutenant Frayne down, and the officers, like the men, are almost inclined to look upon the schooner as a specter craft, for she showed no flag, they say, fired no shot, and just glided away from the brigantine like a racer from a scrub."

"And Frayne was to send a boat for me in the morning, you say?"

"Yes, sir; but I returned the way I went, on horseback."

"Well, I am glad I did not wait, even if this storm does drench us through, for the corsair may return at any moment, and I wish to be on board the brigantine."

"Yes, captain, for there is no telling, sir, when or where Belmont, the *Buccaneer*, may turn up, for we, of the cutter, have chased him scores of times, and he's like a sea-wizard, here, there and everywhere," put in Jacinto, innocently.

"Ah! I forgot you were in the chase; tell me about it, my man."

Without the slightest hesitation the pirate told the story, guessing at facts of which he knew nothing, and hitting strangely near the truth, for not once was he contradicted by Walter Nevil, who had heard the narrative from Lieutenant Frayne.

"Well, Walter, it seems we have all had adventures, for I arrested that Spanish gentleman for the pirate, and then drank wine with the very man I have been ordered to take dead or alive—Ha! now we get the storm from the lake, sweeping up this bayou; but we will soon be in comfortable quarters, and I sincerely hope the corsair will not make us put to sea to-night."

"There is no telling, sir, for he may be anchored now within a few cable-lengths of the brigantine," said Jacinto.

"True, he might be; but let him come that near the guns of the *Huntress* and he is my prisoner."

Jacinto made no immediate reply; but after a moment put his tiller hard down, and the yawl dashed in under the overhanging branches of the trees that lined the bayou's banks, and then, while the cold muzzle of a pistol pressed the temples of Harold Sylvester and Walter Nevil, he said, in deep, stern tones:

"Gentlemen, you are my prisoners! One word or movement and you die!"

CHAPTER XLI.

WHAT A BLUE-LIGHT REVEALED.

For pen to portray the surprise, and the indignation of Captain Harold Sylvester and Walter Nevil were impossible, and they at first believed, or rather hoped that it was a joke, and that the crew of the boat were some of the cutter's officers on a lark; but the pistols pressed against their heads, soon dispelled this illusion, while Jacinto said sternly, yet forcibly:

"You must pardon me, gentlemen, for making you prisoners; but I fear the schooner, *El Maldito*, may return at any moment, and of course with the brigantine's commander in our power, we need feel no fear, should the Chevalier Corsair run into a trap, for, where your vessel lies is one of his favorite anchorages."

"Then you confess to belonging to the crew of Belmont the *Buccaneer*?" asked Harold Sylvester.

"Why deny it, sir, for you will soon find out that we are pirates; but will you give your pledge of honor, both of you, not to call out, or attempt to escape when we pass near the brigantine?"

"And if we decline?" curtly asked the officer.

"Then I shall be forced to place you both in irons, much as I should dislike to do so; ay, and gag you too."

"Then I pledge myself, for I wish no greater humiliation than I now suffer in being the captive of a pirate."

"And I give my *parole d'honneur*," said Walter Nevil, lightly, for he rather liked the adventure, in being captured by the very pirates they were hoping to make prisoners.

"Then, gentlemen, I trust you; but it is need less for me to say that should you break your parole you will give the signal for your own death; give way, lads! and mind you pull steady, for in spite of the storm, some keen eye upon the brigantine may see us," and sealing himself between his prisoners, Jacinto again took the tiller, and once more the boat moved on in the darkness.

A row of some moments brought them in view

of the dark hull and shadowy rigging of the brigantine; but keeping close inshore, they soon passed, and at last the yawl was headed for the secret arbor, where lay the lugger.

As, at a low order from Jacinto, the men ceased rowing, the quick eye of the pirate coxswain caught sight of an object out upon the dark waters, and he cried:

"Lads, there's the schooner; see, she has just swept up into the wind and let fall her mud-hook."

"You are right, and that accursed blind watch on the brigantine does not see her," said Harold Sylvester, angrily.

"The watch are doubtless hunting the lee of the bulwarks, sir, a night like this; but we must hasten to get El Maldito out of her danger," and as the boat swept in under the moss drapery, a low, stern voice said:

"Hol there, who are you?"

"Jacinto, Señor Navarro; you keep better watch than the brigantine, for she neither saw us, nor the schooner, that lies at anchor a few cables' length from her," answered the coxswain.

"Hal the schooner has run in then, Jacinto?"

"She has, señor, and must run out too, or the break of day will show her the brigantine in pistol-shot range."

"She could not see the brigantine on account of the dark background of the trees; but who have you here, Jacinto, and did you see my friends safely to the city?"

"To the last question I answer yes, señor, and to the former, permit me to introduce Captain Sylvester and Midshipman Nevil, of the American brigantine-of-war *Huntress*, for such I learn they are."

"Do you mean it, Jacinto?" asked the surprised Alvarez Navarro.

"We are such as he states, sir, and entrapped ourselves, believing his boat to be from the cutter; what is your will regarding us?" said Harold Sylvester.

"That the Chevalier Corsair, our chief, must decide, sir; but now please enter the cabin with me, and it is unnecessary to say that an attempt to betray us to those on your vessel will result in your instant death," said Alvarez Navarro, with firmness, yet politely.

"We have given our parole, sir, and will abide by our word," haughtily answered the American captain, and they followed the Cuban into the lugger's cabin, where Tolosa lay upon a settee, and glanced up with surprise at the guests the lieutenant brought in.

"Señor Tolosa, are you well enough to take command of your lugger at once?" asked Alvarez.

"Yes, Señor Navarro, for my men are good men, if they did mutiny for the gold Don Manuel promised them."

"Very well; I leave your lugger in your hands, releasing your crew as soon as they have placed me on board the schooner, which has run in and anchored near by; when your boat returns you had better remain where you are until morning, and then the brigantine will set sail, and you can run out and head for home, and take my advice and stick to an honest life."

"I'll do it, Señor Navarro, for I am not a bad man at heart."

"You have proven that, Tolosa; now here is a purse of gold the Don left for you; farewell, and good fortune to you," and Alvarez grasped the hand of the lugger's skipper and turned away, saying to the two officers:

"When ready, gentlemen, I will send for you."

In a few moments he returned from the deck and bade Harold Sylvester and the midshipman to follow him, and motioned them into the stern-sheets of the boat alongside, and in which were visible, huddled together, gagged and in irons, Don Manuel Hernandez and the lugger's crew, while at the oars sat the men of the schooner.

"Give way; steady all of you, and if a man speaks above a whisper I'll drive my knife to his heart," came in the stern tones of the young Cuban.

The oars, muffled at the rowlocks, and the blades wrapped in moss, fell silently into the water, and out of the embowered basin moved the boat, heading then close inshore, but toward the lake.

There, not two cable-lengths away, lay the *Huntress* at anchor, moving restlessly upon the waters, and tugging impatiently at her anchor, as though a thing of life, and conscious that mischief was going on beneath her very shadow.

Further out, and rising and falling gracefully upon the incoming waves, was the schooner, in full view, even in the darkness and storm, of the watch on the decks of the brigantine, had they not sought shelter from the howling winds and pelting rain.

"Whose watch is it on board, Nevil?" whispered Harold Sylvester.

"Lieutenant Mudock's, sir," returned the middy, in the same low tone.

"Then he shall be court-martialed for this night's neglect, and every one of the watch shall be flogged to improve their eyesight."

"You are speaking too loud, sir," said the pirate lieutenant, sternly.

"Pardon me; but the gross neglect of duty on my vessel made me forget, and—"

"Boat ahoy! what boat is that?" came across the waters in ringing tones.

"They are awake on the schooner," muttered Harold Sylvester.

"It behooves us to be ever on the alert, sir," answered Alvarez, and before he could answer the hail, there came the stern order:

"Stop that boat, or I'll sink her!"

"Ay, ay, sir; I am Alvarez Navarro, señor."

"Ay, ay, come alongside," came the answer.

"Oh, curse those lubbers! they are deaf as well as blind," groaned Harold Sylvester, glancing anxiously at the brigantine, hoping to see some sign of life on board.

"The storm drowns the sound of our voices, sir," said Alvarez.

"But it does not make them blind; but, was not that your chief who hailed?"

"Yes, señor; it was the Chevalier; but, here we are," and the boat ran alongside the schooner, and the lieutenant led the way upon deck.

"Ah, Alvarez, I am glad to see you; but, why did you leave the lugger?" asked the Chevalier, meeting him.

"She is in the basin, señor chief, and I have given the señorita into the hands of her father; but, quick, sir, get up anchor, for yonder, in the shadow of the land lies the brigantine, and only the darkness and storm has prevented your being discovered."

"Hal say you so, my good Alvarez? Then up with the anchor at once, and we'll put to sea in the face of the storm, for never do I wish to meet in a death-struggle the brave man who commands yonder vessel."

"Victor DeLisle, I thank you."

"God in Heaven! who are you?" and the Chevalier Corsair started back as though a serpent had stung him.

"I am Harold Sylvester, and my Government has sent me to hunt you down."

"There is some strange mystery here; what means this, señor Navarro?"

"It means, Victor, that one of your men cleverly made me and Midshipman Nevil prisoners; now you shall know all, but, now I warn you that you are in danger of being seen by the brigantine's crew, and you had better slip off to sea."

"Harold Sylvester, you are the same noble fellow as in the olden time, and it moves me to my inmost heart to stand in your presence now, and with the hand of infamy upon me; but, you are no prisoner of mine, and I will send you at once on board your own vessel, for—"

"Ho, señor chief! a light! a light on the brigantine! we are discovered," cried Alvarez Navarro.

"Ay, ay! then get to sea at once!" was the quiet reply of the Chevalier, as he turned to glance at the *Huntress*, on board of which lights were flashing, and even stern orders heard.

"I am sorry, Captain Sylvester, that the safety of my vessel and crew prevents my returning you on board your vessel now; so you will have to be my temporary guest; but, who are those in that boat?" he called out over the side.

"The lugger's crew, señor chief, and the prisoner, Don Manuel," called out Jacinto, who had remained in the boat with the Spanish officer.

"Hal! I had forgotten him; bring him on board, Jacinto, and cast the boat loose, and get out of range, my men, if you don't wish to be knocked to pieces."

To ungag and unbind the lugger's crew was but the work of a moment with Jacinto, and then he aided Don Manuel up the gangway to the schooner's deck, while the men in the boat, in spite of their stiffened arms from being bound, quickly rowed away in the gloom.

"Ah, Don Manuel Hernandez, I am glad to meet you once more," said the Chevalier Corsair with mock politeness.

The Spaniard scowled, for the gag yet remained in his mouth, and the chief added:

"Take him into the cabin, Jacinto; and, gentlemen, will you not also go there, for the brigantine is getting ready to open upon us?"

Without a word Harold Sylvester and Walter Nevil followed Jacinto and his prisoner, just as the schooner's anchor swung clear, her sails were set, and she darted away from her dangerous position under the very guns of the brigantine.

"Bravo! I never saw quicker work! and see, Nevil, every man is stripped for the fight and at the guns," cried Harold Sylvester, in admiration of the splendid discipline on board the schooner.

"And the *Huntress* is still at anchor, sir," said the middy.

"Yes, and I fear Frayne will not follow, expecting me out in the morning."

"He shall know you are on board, Captain Sylvester," said the Chevalier Corsair, who heard the latter remark, as the two officers hesitated at the cabin companionway.

Both turned with surprise, and the chief called out:

"A blue-light here, Señor Navarro."

And, as he spoke, one, two, three guns boomed forth from the brigantine, whose decks were lighted up with red glare, and her crew seen rushing about in evident excitement and confusion.

But, at anchor as was the *Huntress*, the guns were badly aimed and the iron shot flew wide of the mark.

"Now, Captain Sylvester, you and your young officer stand here, please; burn the blue-light, señor!"

And the dazzling glare of the blue-light threw out brighter than day every part of the beautiful schooner, from deck to truck, and revealed to the startled eyes of Lieutenant Frayne and the crew of the *Huntress* their captain a prisoner, with Walter Nevil by his side, and standing near the tall, splendid form of the Chevalier Corsair, their captor.

It was a brilliant panorama for a moment, but one that sent dread to the heart of the crew of the brigantine, and when the darkness once more shut the flying El Maldito from their vision, a wild yell burst from their lips, and the ringing orders of Lieutenant Frayne came to the ears of all on board the schooner, while, as the glare of the light died from before their eyes, they saw that the *Huntress* was in hot pursuit, following the buccaneer out over the black waters, that the storm was lashing into mad fury.

But suddenly, out from the shadowy shore, burst flash after flash, and the glare showed the cutter at anchor and firing upon the rushing schooner; but, as in the case of the brigantine's guns, they were not truly aimed.

And gazing upon the now intensely thrilling scene, Harold Sylvester and Walter Nevil saw the *Huntress* alter her course and stand close in toward the cutter, while Lieutenant Frayne's words were distinctly heard, as he shouted forth through his speaking-trumpet:

"For God's sake, Captain Dumont, do not fire upon the pirates, as Captain Sylvester and Midshipman Nevil are prisoners on his deck."

A cry of surprise burst from the cutter's decks, and then the stentorian tones of the old weather-beaten captain shouted back:

"Ay, ay, sir; but we'll run him down and carry his decks by boarding."

And both crews uttered a cheer that floated threateningly over the storm-swept sea, and the captive officers turned their eyes upon their captor to mark its effect; but, calm, indifferent even, he stood near the wheel, and the crew, in grim and ominous silence, were at the guns, stripped to their waists, unheeding the cold blasts and dashing spray, and ready for the struggle, come when, or how it might.

CHAPTER XLII.

A SAD RETURNING.

SEVERAL weeks have passed away since the flight of the pirate schooner from the shores of Lake Borgne, with the brigantine and cutter in full chase, and the scene of my story changes from the land of balmy breezes, the orange and magnolia groves of the Sunny South, to the crisp winds and rock-bound coast of the North.

Rippled by the fresh wind that was sweeping in from the sea, the beautiful harbor of Boston was alive with sails of all kinds, from the fishing *polacca* of the New England coast to the stately frigate, or huge merchantman, just coming in from some distant land.

Among the craft coming up the harbor was a brig of two hundred tons, with high bulwarks, that barely hid, however, the boxes of fruit upon her decks.

Half a dozen dark-faced sailors were lounging forward, and her skipper, a man of fine build, and with a long black beard, was standing at the wheel, while two or three other seamen were near by, and watching with interest the shores that enveloped the bay.

In spite of the brig's clumsy look and rig, she moved through the water at a fair speed, holding her own with a trim brigantine-of-war that was also heading for an anchorage in front of the city.

A glance at the latter vessel was sufficient to recognize the *Huntress*; but her whole look was that of a craft that had been in action, for her hull was scarred by shot, and her topmasts had been shot away, while her sails showed ragged holes where the iron had cut through them.

The merchant brig went close inshore and dropped anchor, in almost the identical spot where some time before the privateer that had so interested Walter Nevil, the midshipman, had found an anchorage, while the vessel of-war swept further up the harbor and came to a standstill a short distance from the city docks.

Hardly had the sails been furled on the brig, when darkness came on, or rather night, for a full moon lighted up the harbor and city; but with the dying of daylight the crew of the strange vessel seemed not to settle down to rest, as a boat was lowered from the stern davits, and soon after put ashore, and in it were three persons besides the two oarsmen.

Landing under the shadow of Copps' Hill the

three persons in the stern sprung ashore, and one, turning, addressed the oarsmen.

"Wait for me here, Lindo, and upon no account leave the boat, or hold converse with any one from the shore."

"Yes, señor, we will obey you," answered the man, respectfully.

Walking up the hillside, until a path branched around to the right, the three men came to a halt, and one said in a low, sad tone:

"Here we part, gentlemen, and doubtless forever."

"I hope not, Victor, for now that I know you to be different from what the world calls you, I will resign rather than have to hunt you down; though outlaw you may be, through the misfortune you brought upon yourself in the rescue of Conrado Costello, I well know that toward your own land, and its flag, you have been true, and never turned your guns, and I will make an official report to Government of what you are; ay, and say, too, in the threatening war with Great Britain you will strike a blow upon the seas for the United States."

"I have promised you, Harold, and I will keep my word; by a strange coincidence your brigantine has arrived in port just as we have; but they little dream on board that they were within fifty feet of the vessel they looked for."

"And how could they, with your schooner disguised so skillfully into a clumsy merchant brig? but your secret is safe, and not until I see that you have sailed will I tell the secret; but you still think that it was the *caravel* of Conrado Costello she has been in action with, and not an English vessel?"

"Yes, Harold, for her scars are all forward, showing that she received them from a vessel flying from her, and the *caravel* is about the only craft, excepting my *El Maldito* that could keep ahead of you brigantine and also wound her."

"Yet why should the *caravel* be in these waters, for it is evident the fight was very recent, as Prayne would not have awaited to get into port to repair damages."

For a moment the Chevalier was silent, and then he said, sadly:

"Harold, I will tell you why this *caravel* is in these waters; do you remember that my sister Mabel and Conrado Costello were once engaged?"

"Yes, alas! I do remember it."

"Well, he has come on here to drag her from her home, and that is why I followed him; yes, I was in chase of him off the Balize, but a fearful storm, you remember it, caused me to run before it off my course, and that is why, in being again in Lake Borgne that night, that I ran in and anchored in the inlet; but discovering your vessel I put at once to sea, and I headed for Boston, hoping to reach here before the *caravel*; God grant that I have done so."

"Amen! but if Costello has been here before us, Victor, then woe be unto him, for I'll hunt him from off the sea."

"And so will I, Harold; but I detain you, so will let you go down the shore and return to your vessel; but," and he paused a moment, "if you see my sister, and my old father, tell them that I am not as black as I am painted; gentlemen, farewell," and as though fearing to trust himself further the Chevalier raised his cap, wheeled quickly and strode on up the hill, Harold Sylvester and Walter Nevil watching him with pitying eyes, for in the time they had been together, as guests on the schooner, since the flight in the storm from Lake Borgne, they had learned to respect him in spite of the brand that was upon him.

Reaching the summit of the hill the Chevalier, as on that night long before, stepped lightly over the stile, and once more stood in the old cemetery.

The moon looked down upon the white marble tombs, giving them a ghastly look, and the silence of death indeed rested upon the lonely place, with only the distant rumble of the city echoing in the ears of the returned outlaw.

With a hesitating glance he raised his eyes to the street beyond, upon which fronted the cottage home of Marian Dalton.

But he saw no welcoming light glimmering forth from the window; all was dark and desolate, though here and there, from other houses, gleamed the rays of a lamp.

Hastily he wound his way along the path, until he came to the spot where had slept the ashes of the Daltons for several generations, and his eyes quickly ran over the graves, some marked with marble slabs, and others unmarked, save in the memories of those who loved them dead as they had in life.

The pretentious tomb erected to the captain towered high, and there upon each side was a grave.

Ay, each grave still uncovered by the flowers that loving hands are wont to place above those they bury forever from sight.

But small marble slabs marked the heads of each, and kneeling down he glanced eagerly upon the inscription of the grave to the right, and said, in husky tones:

"It is her mother; poor Marian."

And then he turned to the other new-made

grave, and his eyes blinded with tears as he read:

"IN MEMORY OF
"MARIAN DALTON.
"Aged 40 years.
"Died of a broken heart."

No word, no cry came from the lips of the strong man; but his head bent forward and rested upon the cold marble, while memory took its backward flight to the scenes of long ago, when life was bright with hope for him, and she who lay sleeping there beneath the cold, wet earth, was his promised bride.

For a long time he remained thus in silent, bitter grief, and then the sound of voices awoke him to himself once more, and looking up, outside the graveyard fence he saw two persons walking slowly along together.

One was a man, the other a woman, and they were wending their way around the hill, to where grew a solitary tree overlooking the bay, and beneath which was, or had been in the olden time, a rustic seat.

"They are going to the old trysting-place, where so many tales of love have been told, and where you, my poor, poor Marian, were wont to wander with me."

"Died of a broken heart; they have put sad words upon your tomb, Marian, to meet the eye of one who broke your pure heart; ah me! it has turned my poor heart to iron to come here once more to these familiar scenes, and be welcomed by thy grave."

He looked sadly down upon the mound, pressed his lips upon the cold marble, and rising left the cemetery, wending his way in the direction of the city.

A walk of some minutes and again the Chevalier entered the gate that led to the beautiful grounds surrounding the De Lisle mansion.

Standing in the shadow of the evergreen hedge he gazed in gloomy silence upon the grand old homestead, a spacious mansion of stone, with acres around it, though it stood almost in the heart of the busy city.

At length he summoned up courage to approach the door.

It was fastened, but a blow on the heavy brass knocker caused steps to be heard within, and the portal opened, to reveal an old negro by the hall lamp.

"Jacob, not a word, unless you would see me die," said the Chevalier, in a quick, but low tone.

The old negro started back, his hands outstretched, while in a husky voice he cried:

"Fore God, it is Massa Victor."

"Yes, Jacob; the Prodigal Son has returned, yet not to stain the old place long with his presence," he said, bitterly.

"Lordy, Massa Victor, don't talk so, for old Jacob is glad to see you, though they do say you is a mighty bad man; yet you don't look it, sir; but come in, sir, come into the library, as it might not be safe for you here."

He led the way through the hall, but at the door the Chevalier checked him.

"Is my father not in there?"

"Massa Victor, is it possible you don't know where your father is?" asked Jacob, in a subdued tone.

"Then he is not at home?"

"Yes, Massa Victor, your old father am at home; in that home where he will stay until the good God call him to him at judgment."

"Dead! dead! and with a curse in his heart for me, his outcast son."

The strong man staggered into the room and sunk into a chair before the blazing fire, while old Jacob said, softly:

"No, Massa Victor, you wrong the ole man, sir, for he did forgive you, sir, 'deed he did, and said with his last breath he hoped God would guide his poor boy back to honor and right."

"Jacob, said my father this of me, or do you tell me this to save my aching heart?" and he grasped the negro by each shoulder in his strong hands until he made him writhe with pain.

"It am the truth, 'fore God it am, Massa Victor."

"And he did not curse me with his latest breath?"

"No, massa, no, sir; he gave you his blessin', wherever you might be, on the sea or land."

"God above, I thank Thee!" and the sorrow-crushed man again sunk into his seat, and for a moment trembled with the deep emotions that flooded his inmost being.

"And my sister?" he at last asked.

"Ah, Massa Victor, she always loved you, sir, and—but hasn't you seen her, sir?"

"Seen my sister, Jacob? why, where should I see her but at home?"

"But she went forth to see you, sir, only half an hour ago."

"Jacob, in God's name what do you mean?" and the Chevalier was again upon his feet.

"Why, Massa Victor, your eyes scare me, sir, blazin' that way; but I'll tell you all I knows, sir; you see Massa Conrado—"

"Conrado Costello do you mean?" almost shrieked the man.

"Yes, sir; he came here to-night, sir, and he

told Miss Mabel you had sent him to tell her to come to you, as you was afraid to be seen—"

"Hal the devil's work has begun; it was them that I saw going down to the Trysting Tree; but I'll be on his path at once."

Without another word to the startled Jacob he darted out of the library and the mansion, leaving the old negro muttering dolefully to himself:

"I fears Massa Victor has been so bad that the good Lord has made him go clean gone crazy; but I hopes he'll come back to the paths o' rightitude and goodness, or poor Missy Mabel will droop an' die, same as Missy Marian did," and kneeling down by the table the pious old soul, who had been half a century in the De Lisle family, raised his eyes and hands above, and prayed earnestly:

"Oh, the blessed Lord in the beautiful skies, don't turn away Thy ears from me 'cause I hain't got no lily skin, but hearken unto my words, and lead back out o' the rugged path o' sin that poor boy, who is sowin' tares upon the wide sea—tares that will spring up an' make hemp to hang him with, an' place him in a ignominy grave, on which ther beautiful flowers o' Thy Love will never grow, but be choked out by the weeds o' ther devil's garden."

"Oh, Lord, the precious God, hear this ole nigger's prayer, and fetch that poor lost lamb back into Zion's fold, an' not let him plunge in the darkness of sin off the precipice of destruction."

"Do this, good Lord, for him, and I'll axe nothin' for the ole nigger—though thar's heaps I wants, my precious Savior: Amen."

CHAPTER XLIII.

HAVING determined to make his home in the future in New Orleans, Don Ivan Enderos, a few days after his arrival at the *cabaret* of Pierre Jacot with his beautiful daughter, purchased a handsome mansion upon the *Rue St. Charles*, and ordering it thoroughly refitted and refurbished, determined to go to the West Indies and settle up his affairs there.

Unwilling to trust his daughter again from under his protection, Don Ivan engaged passage for her also, on a large and swift-sailing clipper ship that was bound to Boston, but which promised to touch at Havana and land him, for a handsome consideration in gold.

As the packet was to sail by daybreak, the Don, with Stella, and her maid, Ninetta, repaired on board at night, and sought their comfortable state-rooms, and when they awoke late the next morning, at the steward's announcement of breakfast, they found the vessel gracefully riding over the blue waters of the Gulf.

Repairing to the deck, to await until his daughter had made her toilet, Don Ivan started visibly as he beheld two familiar forms standing upon the quarter-deck, and gazing with interest over the rolling waves.

"I am readily delighted, Don Henrico, that my sister and myself were persuaded to join you and Miss Enderos in your Northern trip, for I dearly love the sea."

"And so do I, M. Valverde, and now that we are in deep water, I confess I am like another man, for I had a deep weight upon me while in the city, one I will cast from me, at least for awhile."

"I noticed that you seemed ill of late, Don Henrico, and I feared the cause of your worry was that very strange man, of the same name as yourself—Don Ivan Enderos."

"He was; I have more cause to dread that man, M. Noel, than you can ever know; but here come Edna and Manine."

The Hunchback had listened with rapt attention to every word he had heard, and shrunk from sight against the mizzenmast, as there suddenly appeared on deck Edna Enderos and Manine Valverde, both looking exquisitely beautiful in their traveling suits of dark blue, and pretty sailor hats.

As they ascended to the poop-deck, Don Ivan crept below, muttering:

"A strange fatality has brought that man again in my power; oh, Love! oh, Revenge! which shall conquer?"

"Must I give up my heritage of hatred, for—Ah! Stella, my child, I was going to seek you, for you need a breath of the bracing sea air before breakfast; come!"

He slipped his arm through hers, and led her to the deck, stopping near where Don Henrico and his companions stood.

A startled cry came from the lips of Don Henrico as his eyes suddenly fell upon the hideous form and face of the Hunchback, and all glanced in the direction in which he was gazing, his face deadly pale, his form trembling.

And from Edna's pallid lips came a cry, as she too saw that man, whom, of all others, she dreaded.

"Hal! it is the Hunchback—hold! for the love of God! hold! Joeko!" and M. Noel Valverde sprang forward just in time to catch the uplifted arm of the Black Dwarf, which was descending knife in hand, upon the defenseless neck of the Hunchback, who had not noticed his stealthy descent from the rigging.

Startled, in spite of his nerve, Don Ivan

turned to see how near he had been to death, while Stella, with a shriek, threw her arms around her father, as though to shield him, as Jocko, furious with rage, shouted:

"Oh, massee, massee, lettee Jocko killee badee man."

"No, sir, stand aside I say! and go forward, or I'll have you hurled into the sea," cried M. Noel, sternly, still standing between him and the Hunchback.

"Massee maddee wid Jocko," said the dwarf, reproachfully.

"Yes, go forward, sir."

Silently the hideous black obeyed, and then M. Noel turned to Don Ivan.

"You have had a second narrow escape, sir, from death at Jocko's hands; if your presence on board this vessel means harm to Don Henrico or Mademoiselle Enderos, as I believe it does, beware of a third attempt that yonder dwarf may make upon your life."

"M. Valverde, until ten minutes ago I knew not of the presence of yourself or of Don Henrico on this ship; but permit me to present to you my daughter; Stella, this is M. Noel Valverde, to whom I owe a larger debt of gratitude than I can ever repay."

"His daughter!" the words came with a sneer from Don Henrico; but showing no surprise, no matter what he felt at seeing an angel in form and face the daughter of a human monster, Noel Valverde raised his hat politely at the introduction and said:

"It gives me pleasure to meet the Señorita Enderos," and turning, with the easy courtesy natural to him, he continued, with a glance of warning at Don Henrico: "Don Enderos, you have met Don Ivan before, and so has Señorita Edna; but permit me to present the Señorita Stella," and motioning to Manine, he also introduced her to the Hunchback and his daughter.

Though surprised, Don Henrico graciously acknowledged the introduction to the beautiful girl, who was also most kindly received by both Edna and Manine.

With his usual presence of mind, Don Ivan at once cast off all feeling of restraint, and entered into pleasant conversation with all, so that neither Manine or Stella dreamed of what had taken place in the past to cause hatred between those three men, or the deadly attack of Jocko upon the Hunchback.

Though not believing the assertion of the Hunchback that he had not known of his presence on board the ship, Don Henrico, with Jocko near, and the low, stern warning M. Noel had given him, felt little dread of an attack upon him, at least for the present, and led the way to breakfast, without the slightest annoyance upon his face; but with a determination in his heart that between the Black Dwarf and himself the Hunchback should never reach the end of his voyage.

"It will be a pity," he muttered, "for that beautiful girl's sake, to make her fatherless; but my life is worth more to me than can be such a father to her."

And, with this deadly intention in his heart, Don Henrico became almost gay, as they all sat together at breakfast; but in the heart of the Hunchback was a black resolve, too, that his half-brother should yet die by his hand, for, had not there been sworn a fearful treble oath that must be kept, that he might reap the full benefit of his heritage of hatred?

And away the good ship flew on her voyage, unmindful of the loves and hates on board, and at length the green isle of Cuba hove in sight, and still neither one of the half-brothers had died by the other's hand, for Jocko's black face had kept Don Ivan from deadly action, and his appearing on deck, by night, always accompanied by his guardian angel, his beautiful daughter, had held in check Don Henrico and the too willing Black Dwarf.

But, suddenly a sail hove in sight, an armed vessel, coming out of Havana, and carrying at her peak the flag of Great Britain, and away sped the swift clipper ship, for already had war been declared between England and the United States, and the unarmed merchantman had to fly from the cruiser, holding on her northerly course, and carrying Don Ivan and Stella forced passengers upon her decks.

CHAPTER XLIV.

RETRIBUTION.

WHEN the Chevalier rushed out of his boyhood's home, leaving old Jacob praying in the library, he felt that his worst fears were realized, and that Conrado Costello had really gotten Mabel into his power, through a clever story that he came from him.

As the two persons had passed the cemetery, when he knelt by Marian Dalton's grave, it seemed as though there was a certain familiar look about them; but in the moonlight he failed to recognize who were the two supposed lovers, yet, after hearing what Jacob had to say, he well knew that the path to the Trysting Tree led also to the shore, and that in the inlet that put in around the hill there was a good and quiet anchorage for a vessel.

As he now bounded along the path, he suddenly stopped, for out of the inlet glided a ves-

sel, which, in spite of her lateen sails being changed to make her appear a barkentine, a very unusual kind of craft in those days, yet a style of rig that would attract less attention in a North American port than a three-masted caravel, with huge lateen sails; besides, it disguised her beyond casual recognition, from any vessel's crew that might know her.

Remembering how his own beautiful schooner had been skillfully metamorphosed into a clumsy brig, the Chevalier understood the cheat at once, and down the hillside he dashed at full speed, found his two men patiently waiting in the boat, and springing into the stern-sheets gave the order to pull for the schooner in a manner that caused the rowers to lose no time.

"Did you see that queer craft running out just now, señor chief?" asked one of the men.

"Yes, it is the game I am after."

"I thought she hadn't an honest look, sir, and she came sneaking out from inshore somewhere as though she had been in mischief."

"She has been—way 'nough!" and the boat touched the schooner's side.

"Up with that boat lively, lads! Señor Alvarez raise the anchor and set the craft under sail, and, as soon as we have passed the fort, call the crew up, for there is work ahead of them," was the stern order.

"Ay, ay, sir; but there is a gentleman waiting to see you, sir; he is in the cabin, and it is our late guest, Midshipman Nevil."

"Ah!" and seeing that his orders were already being obeyed the Chevalier entered the cabin, and said pleasantly, as Walter Nevil arose to meet him:

"Glad to see you back, Mr. Nevil; but have you news for me?"

"Yes, sir; we went on board the Huntress, and Mr. Frayne making his report, Captain Sylvester bade me return and say to you that after the schooner dropped the brigantine astern, she came upon the caravel in the darkness, and a running fight of some hours followed; but the caravel escaped in the darkness, and seemed to be heading for Boston harbor, though inquiry among the shipping, which I was ordered to make, shows that no such vessel has run in."

"You are mistaken, Midshipman Nevil, for, as you saw how thoroughly I disguised this schooner, with false bulwarks, and changing her rig, so has the caravel been metamorphosed, and, you may say to Captain Sylvester that she has just put to sea, and that Conrado Costello has my sister Mabel in his power."

"Oh, Captain Belmont! is it as bad as that?" cried the midshipman, with much sympathy, calling the Chevalier by his middle name of Belmont, which he had assumed when outlawed.

"It is true, sir; but I am now getting under way, and shall follow the caravel to sea, and though he ran away from the brigantine he cannot from El Maldito."

"I wish you success, sir, and Captain Sylvester will not be far astern of you, when he learns that Miss De Lisle is in that man's power," and grasping the Chevalier's hand in farewell the noble-hearted young midshipman was soon in his waiting boat, and on his way back to the brigantine, on board which there was great rejoicing at the return of Harold Sylvester and himself, for Lieutenant Frayne had intended to go ashore in the morning and report the capture of his commander, and a midshipman, and their supposed death at the hands of cruel pirates.

As though fortune favored Conrado Costello, the anchor of the schooner could not be raised, it having in some way become fast in a rock on the bottom, and the cable had to be cut, so that precious time was lost, and the caravel had gained a long start, before the schooner was fairly under way.

Then again the wind, that had been fresh up the harbor, died away when the schooner was off Nick's Mate, and she hardly moved through the water, while afar off at sea a six-knot breeze was blowing, and with a glass the caravel was discovered dashing swiftly along, and steadily changing her rig back to her lateen sails.

And yet the schooner could have made better time, if under her regular rig; but the Chevalier dared not, in the very entrance to the harbor, throw off his disguise, as the fort might disable him, and with the foe he sought in sight.

Pacing the deck with an impatience the crew had never seen him show before, the Chevalier turned his gaze upon the distant caravel, and then over the side, to see if the schooner was really moving, and thus it went on until the east grew rosy with the approach of dawn, and a brisk breeze sprung up with the rising sun.

Then away glided the disguised vessel, until once free of outgoing and incoming craft, there was a stern order from the chief:

"On deck, all of you, men! Up with those guns, lads! Down into the hold with those boxes!"

Merrily the crew sprung to work, and like magic the fruit-boxes disappeared from the decks, and out of the hold were raised the heavy guns, while the racks, with small-arms, encircled the masts, and the false bulwarks were taken off.

A few moments more the old sails were taken down, one by one; the cross-trees were lowered to the deck and stowed away, and the snow-white canvas, the schooner's mainsail, mizzen-sail, topsails, staysail and jibs were set with an alacrity that was remarkable.

And, as though feeling proud to be herself once more, the beautiful vessel bent to the breeze and rushed over the waters with a speed that brought a wild cheer from her crew.

"Now show us the caravel, señor," cried Alvarez Navarro, with enthusiasm.

"She was just there at daylight, a mere speck; but though we have lost her we will soon raise her above the horizon, for, El Maldito, my beautiful bird of the sea, you are racing with the wind itself," answered the Chevalier, with pardonable admiration of his beautiful vessel.

"Your prophecy was true, señor chief; the look-out sees the caravel," said Alvarez Navarro, an hour after, and as he spoke there came the cheering cry from aloft:

"Sail ho!"

"Ay, ay, Jacinto; I knew those eagle eyes of yours would soon find her; whereaway?" called out the Chevalier, with considerable excitement in his manner.

"Dead ahead, sir."

"What do you make her?"

"There was a dead silence followed the question, and then came the reply, and it brought a wild yell from the crew.

"It is the lateen rig, señor."

"Noble Jacinto; those words shall make you a lieutenant on the schooner; descend to the deck, sir."

The man came slowly down, and was met by the Chevalier, who said earnestly:

"Señor Jacinto, you have ever been a good man and true aboard this vessel, and I reward you now by making you next in rank to Lieutenant Alvarez."

A cheer answered the words of their chief, for the newly-made officer was most popular with all on board.

With all sail set the schooner fairly flew along, and soon the lateen sails of the caravel were seen from the deck, and all eyes eagerly watched them as they rose above the horizon.

"Sail ho!"

"Ay, ay; whereaway?" and the Chevalier hailed the top anxiously, for he dreaded a cruiser might appear and drive him away from his game.

"In a line with the caravel, sir; it is a large vessel, a clipper ship, and—"

"And what, sir?" asked the chief, as the look-out paused.

"The caravel is in chase of her, sir."

"Hail say you so, my man?" and the chief sprang into the ratlines and quickly ascended the rigging and leveled his glass.

"By Heaven! you are right, Soulé! She is within a mile of her, and there goes a gun for her to heave-to; but she still holds on—Hail another gun! and yet the ship refuses to come to," and, descending to the deck, the Chevalier ordered every additional sail set that would catch a breath of wind.

And, as the flying vessel fairly bounded from wave to wave, the sails of the caravel and ship arose more rapidly, the one pursued, the other pursuing, and the deep boom of the guns showing that the chased craft still held on her course, unmindful of the iron hail sent after her.

At length the ship was seen to steer wildly, and, coming to, it was made apparent that a well-aimed shot from the caravel had cut away her bow-sprit, and the gallant merchant vessel had been compelled at last to come to, or be sunk by her armed pursuer.

And yet it seemed but a short-lived triumph for the crew of the caravel, for, intent on their chase, they had not noticed the schooner in their wake, until they sprang on board the ship, and some quick eye fell upon the coming corsair rushing down upon them.

To spring back upon their own craft; cut the lashings that bound the two vessels together, was an instant's work, and the caravel stood away, as though to size her adversary.

A short observation proved who her antagonist was, and with her men at her guns she changed her course so as to meet the schooner.

To gaze upon the two armed vessels, one could not but be lost in admiration at their exquisite beauty of model, and symmetry of rig; while though the schooner was a trifle the largest, the caravel carried two more guns, and a score more men.

But the two were beautifully matched for a sea-fight, the El Maldito's greater speed making up for what she lacked in metal and men.

Instinctively feeling that it was to be a battle to the death, the crews of both vessels had gone to their guns without orders, and each craft was in thorough fighting trim, and the same feeling of hatred that inspired the two commanders was felt by the men.

As they drew nearer to each other the clipper ship lay drifting upon the waters, all on board too deeply interested in the impending combat to notice the dead and wounded upon their own deck, or to seek safety in flight, for there was one on board the merchant vessel who knew the

schooner well, and, at first sight, pronounced her to be the famous *El Maldito*, the craft of the Chevalier Corsair.

That one was Stella Enderos.

And there was one other on board the merchantman who recognized the *caravel*, and knew it to be under the command of the pretended Padre Bonito, but in reality Conrado Costello, the conspirator.

And that one was Don Ivan, the Hunchback. Nearer and nearer drew the two sea-warriors together, until a flash came from the *caravel's* bow, and a shot went hurtling toward the schooner.

But no response was given, and a second shot was fired from the *caravel*, and down came the English ensign, which she had been flying, and up went a black flag, with a red dagger in the center.

Yet, still there came no response from the schooner, and her peak remained flagless; but, with the speed of a whirlwind, she still came on.

Luffing up suddenly, the *caravel* sent a broadside upon the schooner, and well-aimed; the crashing of timbers was distinctly heard on board the clipper ship; but, though staggered, the beautiful vessel swept on, not a spar, or rope injured.

And still no reply, but another cruel broadside from the *caravel*.

"Great God! has he no guns?" asked the clipper ship's commander.

"The *caravel* will blow him out of the water," said the Hunchback, while M. Noel cried, with enthusiasm:

"He intends to carry the *caravel* by boarding!"

"Oh, God! this is horrible!" and Manine Valverde bent her head in her hands, for, with a glass handed her by her brother, she recognized the tall form of the Chevalier Corsair.

"There stands the schooner's commander—the Chevalier chief," suddenly called out the Hunchback, and his daughter added:

"And Alvarez, father, is by his side."

The schooner was now near enough for those on the ship to distinctly see the Chevalier Corsair, standing erect and calm upon his quarter-deck, and directing the movements of his vessel, which the heavy fire of the *caravel* was wounding deeply.

Taking advantage, after a broadside from his foe, the schooner attempted to run between the *caravel* and the ship, when, putting about quickly, the lateen rig sent another hail of iron upon her adversary, but which went crashing into the merchantman with terrific force.

There were shrieks and curses, groans, and then a moment's silence; but, beneath that deadly broadside several went down, and among them poor Jocko, killed in his tracks, and Don Henrico Enderos.

M. Noel bounded toward the fallen Dwarf, but was recalled by a piercing shriek from Edna, who was bending over the prostrate form of her father, while she cried, in heart-rending tones:

"Father! father! Speak to me, and say you are not dying."

The eyes of the wounded man opened slowly, and rousing an instant met those of the Hunchback fixed upon him with malignant hatred, and he said, faintly:

"Ivan, in my death you have your revenge; spare Edna, my child."

Down upon his knees dropped the Hunchback, and bending over until his lips were near the pallid face, he said, softly:

"Yes, Henrico, I will, for, with thy death, the bitterness of my heart dies, too."

A smile crossed the lips of Don Henrico, and the basely born, who had wrongfully held a heritage of gold and a proud name, was dead, while the one whose inheritance had been sorrow, bitterness and hatred, bent in triumph above him.

"Oh! why does he not fire?"

The pleading cry broke from Manine Valverde, who, unmindful of the death scene about her, had her eyes riveted upon the splendid form, that in the midst of death and destruction, stood unmoved upon his vessel, which was rushing down to grapple with his adversary, the very silence with which he approached being ominous, and as terrible almost as the shots of the *caravel*.

And the cry caused those on the clipper ship once more to turn their gaze upon the two vessels, and a shout went up from their midst, as at last they saw the schooner strike; but it was with three-score men bounding upon the deck of the *caravel*, led by the ringing cry all heard:

"Boarders away! follow me!"

And then the roar of the guns ceased, and the rattle of small-arms, the clash of steel meeting steel, and the cries of combatants followed, and the mad chaos of sounds struck terror to the hearts of those who looked on in safety.

"Oh, brother Noel, must he be killed? Will you not aid him?" cried Manine, earnestly.

"In Heaven's name, Manine, who do you mean?" said the surprised brother.

"That man! the Chevalier Corsair, for he it was that saved my honor, my life, for you remember I confessed all to you, though I kept back his name."

"And he it was, the Chevalier Corsair, who saved me from worse than death, Noel," and Edna Enderos sprung from the side of her dead father, and stood before the man to whom she was engaged.

"Then to his aid I will go, pirate though he be; hol men, who will follow me to yonder deck to serve a noble man?"

A dozen of the clipper's crew answered with a cheer, but the voice of the Hunchback restrained them.

"Hold! the fight has ended; the Chevalier Corsair triumphs!"

It was true; cries of mercy were heard on the *caravel*, and men, in their fright, were springing into the sea.

"Strike no man who cries for quarter!"

All heard the humane order, and all recognized the ringing voice that had commanded:

"Boarders, follow me!"

"Thank God he is safe," said Manine, fervently, and with staring eyes she watched the confused mass on the two vessels that lay side by side, and her face flushed as she saw a boat put off for the clipper ship, and she recognized in the stern the form of the Chevalier; but it paled again when she saw that he held in his arms the form of a young girl.

It was Mabel De Lisle, and she was unconscious, for when she beheld her brother on the schooner's deck she had swooned away, knowing well the moment of death had come for either Conrado Costello or himself.

Over the ship's side came the corsair chief, still bearing his sister in his arms; but he started, and came to a standstill, when he beheld the little group awaiting him; yet, recovering himself quickly, he said in his low, musical tones, and from which every atom of anger had gone, as had the fire of battle from his face:

"Ladies, your pardon for bringing a scene of carnage before your eyes; but war is unavoidable."

"We are grateful for your victory, Señor Chevalier, for, from all accounts, we all owe you thanks for past services rendered, and you have certainly saved us, and this vessel, from the power of a bad man," said Noel Valverde, frankly.

"Ay, a bad man indeed; one whose heart is utterly black, but who shall feel my just vengeance, for he lies on my deck a prisoner; but, sir, may I intrust to the care of these ladies my—I shame to confess it, for her sake, yet must—my sister, whom the chief of yonder vessel last night decoyed from her home, to bring dishonor upon her, even worse than having me, a pirate, for her brother?"

"Your sister? Yes, gladly will I care for her, monsieur," and Manine Valverde approached timidly, just as Mabel De Lisle opened her eyes, and glancing up with a startled look, cried earnestly:

"Victor, my brother, I am saved, saved from worse than death! and by you, my noble brother."

He drew her toward him, with an emotion he could not hide, in spite of his iron will, and not one present was there but was touched by that meeting between the pure, beautiful sister and her erring, outlawed brother.

"Sail ho!"

The cry came from the schooner's deck, and in Alvarez Navarro's voice.

"Whereaway, Alvarez?" cried the Chevalier, springing to the ship's side.

"Our sails hide her from your view, señor chief; it is the brigantine-of-war *Huntress*, and about a league away."

"Ay, ay, Alvarez; put the prisoners in irons, to await the coming of the brigantine, but take Conrado Costello on board the schooner, and have all ready to cast off," was the Chevalier's order, and with trembling lips Mabel turned toward him:

"Oh, brother, will you harm him?"

"Mabel, he is guilty of more crimes than have ever fallen to the lot of one man, and he must suffer the penalty."

"But leave him to the brigantine's commander, Victor."

"No, Mabel, for the commander of yonder vessel is Harold Sylvester, and should he find me here his duty would force him to attack me, and not a gun would I turn against him; he will see you in safety to your home, and one of these days you may welcome me back to the dear old spot, for from this day I raise the stars and stripes at the schooner's peak, and will no longer cruise the seas in dishonor, but against the enemies of my native land."

"Well said, sir, and our best wishes attend you," said Noel Valverde, frankly.

"Ay, Señor Chevalier, let the brightness of thy future illumine the gloom of thy past," and Ivan the Hunchback grasped the hand of the chief.

"The *Huntress* is coming swiftly down upon us, señor," came the warning voice of Alvarez Navarro.

"Ay, ay, señor; Mabel, my sister, farewell," and folding her in his arms an instant, he released her, and doffing his cap, sprung over the side into his boat.

A few moments more he was upon the deck of his schooner, which swung free from the

caravel, and sped away wing-and-wing before the wind, the eyes of those on board the clipper ship anxiously watching his flight, for the *Huntress* was not a mile away.

And as they looked they saw two forms, with hands bound behind them, led upon the quarter-deck, and facing them stood a file of men with muskets, and all knew that two men were doomed to die.

"Oh, Heaven have mercy upon him! for one is Conrado Costello," cried Mabel De Lisle, as, fascinated by the sight, she stood gazing upon the deck of the flying schooner.

"And the other is Manuel Hernandez, my kinsman, and they richly deserve their fate," said Don Ivan, sternly.

And then the rays of the setting sun flashed on the bright sword held in the hand of the Chevalier Corsair, a roar of musketry followed, and the two doomed men sunk down upon the schooner's deck, while up to the peak fluttered the stars and stripes, and from her sides burst forth a salute of thirteen guns in honor of the new career the beautiful little vessel had entered upon.

CHAPTER XLV.

CONCLUSION.

At the close of the war of "1812," and a month after the declaration of peace between the United States and Great Britain, an armed schooner, flying the "stars and stripes," sailed up Boston harbor, and dropped anchor within hailing distance of the Trysting Tree near the cemetery, wherein lay buried Marian Dalton.

A boat put off from the schooner's side, and as it struck the shore, a man sprung out upon the beach; a man with darkly-bronzed face, sternly-set mouth, and sad, dreamy eyes.

He was one to attract attention in any gathering, for he had few peers in manly beauty of face and form, and his naval uniform was most becoming.

With dignified tread he ascended the hill, and in crossing the graveyard, paused and glanced down upon the grave of Marian Dalton with an expression it was hard to read.

A moment he stood thus, and then with a sigh moved slowly on, turning into a street, and at length approaching the handsome home of Commodore Harold Sylvester.

Upon the piazza sat a young and beautiful woman, and by her side stood a little child of two years, who had just thrown a ball of worsted down the broad steps.

"Oh, you naughty Victor! Mamma must have her worsted," said the lady, and the little child was starting to get it, when the stranger in uniform bent, picked it up, and ascended the steps, and his eyes and the young mother's met.

"Oh, Victor! my brother!"

"Mabel!"

For some time neither spoke more, and then Mabel said:

"Victor, how proud of you we all are, in spite of that bitter past, and the commodore, Harold you know, has gotten for you a pardon, for the President willingly gave it, after your gallant sea-service; but my husband will tell you all about it, for it is time for him to return from the Navy Yard."

"I promised you, Mabel, that I would sink the name of the Chevalier Corsair in one of honor, and I have done so; and more, not only you and Harold have forgiven me the past, but also Manine Valverde, whom you remember."

"Remember! why how could any one ever forget that beautiful girl, Victor; but tell me, have you seen her lately?"

"When last in New Orleans, after the great battle of January eighth! I was wounded, as I wrote you, and her brother carried me to his home, and a more devoted nurse sufferer never had than Manine, while Edna, now Mrs. Valverde, was also most attentive."

"They were noble people, brother; but tell me, what became of that West Indian beauty, Stella Enderos and her terrible father?"

"He was killed in the battle, fighting bravely, and his daughter married Alvarez Navarro, her cousin, and who was my first lieutenant, and I landed him at Charleston, to return to New Orleans by stage-coach, for he dearly loves his beautiful wife."

"And have you not a secret to tell of yourself, brother mine?" asked Mrs. Sylvester, anxiously.

"Yes, for I am to marry Manine Valverde, for I love her even more than I did poor Marian, who sleeps in the churchyard beyond the hill," and Victor De Lisle bent his head over the sunny curls of his little namesake, for the memories of the past would crowd upon him with painful vividness; and, in spite of the happiness that came to him in after years, with his lovely wife, Manine, he could not always drive from him the grim specters that would come trooping up from the grave of the buried by-gone, to whisper in his ear the words:

"With all thy honors now, Victor De Lisle, once thou wert branded as Belmont the Bucca-
neer."

Exeunt omnes.

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